

JULY, 1953

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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JULY, 1953

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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

VOL. 2 NO. 6
ISSUE NO. 20



VOYAGE TO ETERNITY by Milton Lesser

Introducing the



AUTHOR



Milton Lesser



WHEN you write about yourself it somehow always gets to sound like statistics. Let's make it statistics, then. I'm twenty-four—be twenty-five, probably, by the time you read this; have been reading science fiction since 1939 and writing it since 1949; did all the usual things like holding an odd assortment of jobs ranging from bartender to real estate salesman, before I settled down to writing as a full-time and much-loved vocation; went to college (William and Mary in Virginia) where I learned how to play a fair to middling game of poker; like Canadian Club, lobster, steak and roast duck; have the usual number of wives, name of Leigh, and one infant daughter name of Deir-

dre (which I'm told means The Troubler in Old Irish Mythology); am currently in the Army, drafted along with about a million other guys to help Uncle out for two years.

So, that's me—but it's not the story behind VOYAGE TO ETERNITY and it's not science fiction, and since I think they're both more interesting to you than I am, let's talk about them. When you're in the Army, one thing strikes you more than anything else—everyone's waiting for something to happen. You can be here today, gone tomorrow—and that's just the way it is. Your name is cut on orders in Washington, on Governor's Island, in smoke-filled rooms, I don't know. And you pack

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IMAGINATION

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of Science
and Fantasy*

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Published monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler Avenue, Evanston, Ill. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Ill. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all manuscripts and subscriptions to IMAGINATION, P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. We do not accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work; submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. The names of all characters that are used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person, living or dead is coincidental. Copyright 1953, Greenleaf Publishing Company. Printed in U.S.A.

JULY 1953

Volume 4

Number 6

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August Issue On Sale

June 30th

Photo-Cover by Malcolm Smith, illustrating VOYAGE TO ETERNITY. Astronomical photo used on front cover, courtesy Yerkes Observatory; back cover, courtesy Mt. Wilson & Palomar Observatories. Interior illustrations by Paul Calle, H. W. McCauley, and W. E. Terry. Cartoons by Ludwig, Hall, Vogel, and Shaffer.

The ditorial



THIS month's cover marks a real first in the science fiction world. We're not speaking of the fact that it's a new Malcolm Smith *photo-cover*—a popular trend that Madge introduced to the field some two years ago. The innovation lies in its background—for the first time an actual photograph of interstellar space is incorporated into a science fiction cover. The photo used by Smith is that of the Spiral Nebula in Andromeda, certainly one of the most impressive astronomical studies. We'd also like to call special attention to the space ships—they're not the conventional "painted" variety. Malcolm put his home workshop to use and carefully fashioned them out of balsa wood, a long, tedious job, but it resulted in a very realistic cover after the model ships had been photographed. Oh, yes, the red ball at the lower right was an orange, which Smith promptly ate after the photograph was made. (We don't know if it was a California or Florida product, but it added just the right flavor Smith wanted!)

WE'D certainly like to get your reaction to this new type of photo-cover, and in the meantime we've got Malcolm working on a number of others, also utilizing actual astronomical backgrounds. So drop us a line—and if

you have any unique ideas of what you'd like to see in a photo-cover of this type, tell us that too.

SPEAKING of space ships and such reminds us of a conversation we had a while back with the director of one of the nation's prominent planetariums. It was interesting to get this learned gentleman's opinions on the possibility of space flight. (We'll withhold his name because we feel sure he'll have to reverse his opinion in the near future!) He contended that space flight—even to the Moon—was not only highly improbable but practically impossible. His reason for feeling this way was because, as he put it, any such ship would require so much of a fuel storage capacity (and *thrust* material, such as sand to be expelled beyond the Earth's atmosphere) that no room would be left for crew and equipment—not to mention the fuel necessary for a return trip.

THE fuel problem for an initial takeoff from Earth's surface, is, of course, a staggering one, and in this respect our scientist friend is quite within reasonable grounds for his skepticism. However, to flatly state that space flight is out of the question because of this is being somewhat less than farsighted. It is much the same as

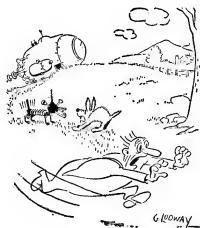
looking at a stalled automobile with a run-down battery and stating: "This car will not run." Of course it will not run, unless you give it an outside assist—a push. Today space flight is resolving into a similar situation. The point is, we have at our possible command just such a *push*.—The highly touted space station. True, this is still in the theoretical stage (simply because one does not as yet exist) but many top-flight scientists have considered the project as a practical solution, and are, indeed, working on it.

SO we offer to our skeptical astronomer the logical sequence of events a space station would introduce. It will be no problem to send ships from Earth to a space station where they can be refueled to resume their journey to Luna. Once the Moon has been reached a much more elaborate takeoff point is at hand—to reach Mars or Venus. And since the Moon's gravitational attraction is roughly only one-sixth that of Earth the acceleration necessary to escape its pull would present no critical problem. Too, much larger ships, with great storage capacity, could be built on the Moon for such an interplanetary venture. In essence, the Moon would be a super space station . . . A science fiction dream? A few years ago, yes. But not today. It may be a natural tendency to be conservative, as our planetarium director appears to be, but in this swiftly moving technological age conservatism (and its brother skepticism) are being left swiftly behind. There are doubtless many

more people in the same skeptical boat in regard to space flight—than are in our optimistic canoe. But one of these days that canoe is going to be parked on the Moon's surface—and then watch the mad scramble to book passage!

SPEAKING of things to come, next month brings us a new novel by top-favorite Geoff St. Reynard. (Remember his ARMA-GEDDON — 1970 last year?)

Geoff's new novel is entitled THE BUTTONED SKY, and it's a story you don't want to miss. One way you can be sure of not missing it—and future issues which will have some pleasant surprises—is to subscribe. If you'll turn to page 162 you'll find out how easy it is—and economical too!—so what are you waiting for? See you next month, June 30th wlr



VOYAGE TO ETERNITY

By
Milton Lesser

Temple faced leaving Earth — and the girl he loved — if his country drafted him. But the hard part was in knowing he'd never return! . . .

WHEN the first strong sunlight of May covered the tree-arched avenues of Center City with green, the riots started. The people gathered in angry





knots outside the city hall, met in the park and littered its walks with newspapers and magazines as they gobbled up editorial comment at a furious rate, slipped with dark of night through back alleys and planned things with furious futility. Center City's finest knew when to make themselves scarce: their uniforms stood for everything objectionable at this time and they might be subjected to clubs, stones, taunts, threats, leers—and knives.

But Center City, like most communities in United North America, had survived the Riots before and would survive them again. On past performances, the damage could be estimated, too. Two-hundred fifty-seven plate glass windows would be broken, three-hundred twelve limbs fractured. Several thousand people would be treated for minor bruises and abrasions, Center City would receive half that many damage suits. The list had been drawn clearly and accurately; it hardly ever deviated.

And Center City would meet its quota. With a demonstration of reluctance, of course. The healthy approved way to get over social trauma once every seven-hundred eighty days.

* * *

"Shut it off, Kit. Kit, please."

The telio blared in a cheaply feminine voice, "Oh, it's a long way to nowhere, forever. And

your honey's not coming back, never, never, never . . ." A wailing trumpet represented flight.

"They'll exploit anything, Kit."

"It's just a song."

"Turn it off, please."

Christopher Temple turned off the telio, smiling. "They'll announce the names in ten minutes," he said, and felt the corners of his mouth draw taut.

"Tell me again, Kit," Stephanie pleaded. "How old are you?"

"You know I'm twenty-six."

"Twenty-six. Yes, twenty-six, so if they don't call you this time, you'll be safe. Safe, I can hardly believe it."

"Nine minutes," said Temple in the darkness. Stephanie had drawn the blinds earlier, had dialed for sound-proofing. The screaming in the streets came to them as not the faintest whisper. But the song which became briefly, masachistically popular every two years and two months had spoiled their feeling of seclusion.

"Tell me again, Kit."

"What."

"You know what."

He let her come to him, let her hug him fiercely and whimper against his chest. He remained passive although it hurt, occasionally stroking her hair. He could not assert himself for another—he looked at his strap chrono—for another eight minutes. He

might regret it, if he did, for a lifetime.

"Tell me, Kit."

"I'll marry you, Steffy. In eight minutes, less than eight minutes, I'll go down and get the license. We'll marry as soon as it's legal."

"This is the last time they have a chance for you. I mean, they won't change the law?"

Temple shook his head. "They don't have to. They meet their quota this way."

"I'm scared."

"You and everyone else in North America, Steffy."

She was trembling against him.

"It's cold for June."

"It's warm in here." He kissed her moist eyes, her nose, her lips.

"Oh God, Kit. Five minutes."

"Five minutes to freedom," he said jauntily. He did not feel that way at all. Apprehension clutched at his chest with tight, painful fingers, almost making it difficult for him to breathe.

"Turn it on, Kit."

HE dialed the telio in time to see the announcer's insincere smile. Smile seventeen, Kit thought wryly. Patriotic sacrifice.

"Every seven-hundred eighty days," said the announcer, "two-hundred of Center City's young men are selected to serve their country for an indeterminate period regulated rigidly by a rotation

system."

"Liar!" Stephanie cried. "No one ever comes back. It's been thirty years since the first group and not one of them . . ."

"Shh," Temple raised a finger to his lips.

"This is the thirteenth call since the inception of what is popularly referred to as the Nowhere Journey," said the announcer. "Obviously, the two hundred young men from Center City and the thousands from all over this hemisphere do not in reality embark on a Journey to Nowhere. That is quite meaningless."

"Hooray for him," Temple laughed.

"I wish he'd get on with it."

"No, ladies and gentlemen, we use the word Nowhere merely because we are not aware of the ultimate destination. Security reasons make it impossible to . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Stephanie impatiently. "Go on."

" . . . therefore, the Nowhere Journey. With a maximum security lid on the whole project, we don't even know why our men are sent, or by what means. We know only that they go somewhere and not nowhere, bravely and not fearfully, for a purpose vital to the security of this nation and not to slake the thirst of a chessman of regiments and divisions.

"If Center City's contribution

helps keep our country strong, Center City is naturally obligated . . ."

"No one ever said it isn't our duty," Stephanie argued, as if the announcer could indeed hear her. "We only wish we knew something about it—and we wish it weren't forever."

"It isn't forever," Temple reminded her. "Not officially."

"Officially, my foot. If they never return, they never return. If there's a rotation system on paper, but it's never used, that's not a rotation system at all. Kit, it's forever."

" . . . to thank the following sponsors for relinquishing their time . . ."

"No one would want to sponsor *that*," Temple whispered cheerfully.

"Kit," said Stephanie, "I — I suddenly have a hunch we have nothing to worry about. They missed you all along and they'll miss you this time, too. The last time, and then you'll be too old. That's funny, too old at twenty-six. But we'll be free, Kit. Free."

"He's starting," Temple told her.

A large drum filled the entire telio screen. It rotated slowly, from bottom to top. In twenty seconds, the letter A appeared, followed by about a dozen names. Abercrombie, Harold. Abner, Eu-

gene. Adams, Gerald. Sorrow in the Abercrombie household. Despair for the Abners. Black horror for Adams.

The drum rotated.

"They're up to F, Kit."

Fabian, Gregory G . . .

Names circled the drum slowly, like viscous alphabet soup. Meaningless, unless you happened to know them.

"Kit, I knew Thomas Mulvany."

N, O, P . . .

"It's hot in here."

"I thought you were cold."

"I'm suffocating now."

R, S . . .

"T!" Stephanie shrieked as the names began to float slowly up from the bottom of the drum.

Tabor, Tebbets, Teddley . . .

Temple's mouth felt dry as a ball of cotton. Stephanie laughed nervously. Now — or never. Never?

Now.

Stephanie whimpered despairingly.

TEMPLE, CHRISTOPHER.

"**S**ORRY I'm late, Mr. Jones."
"Hardly, Mr. Smith. Hardly. Three minutes late."

"I've come in response to your ad."

"I know. You look old."

"I am over twenty-six. Do you mind?"

"Not if you don't, Mr. Smith. Let me look at you. Umm, you seem the right height, the right build."

"I meet the specifications exactly."

"Good, Mr. Smith. And your price."

"No haggling," said Smith. "I have a price which must be met."

"Your price, Mr. Smith?"

"Ten million dollars."

The man called Jones coughed nervously. "That's high."

"Very. Take it or leave it."

"In cash?"

"Definitely. Small unmarked bills."

"You'd need a moving van!"

"Then I'll get one."

"Ten million dollars," said Jones, "is quite a price. Admittedly, I haven't dealt in this sort of traffic before, but—"

"But nothing. Were your name Jones, really and truly Jones, I might ask less."

"Sir?"

"You are Jones exactly as much as I am Smith."

"Sir?" Jones gasped again.

Smith coughed discreetly. "But I have one advantage. I know you. You don't know me, Mr. Arkalion."

"Eh? Eh?"

"Arkalion. The North American Carpet King. Right?"

"How did you know?" the man

whose name was not Jones but Arkalion asked the man whose name was not Smith but might as well have been.

"When I saw your ad," said not-Smith, "I said to myself, 'now here must be a very rich, influential man.' It only remained for me to study a series of photographs readily obtainable—I have a fine memory for that, Mr. Arkalion—and here you are; here is Arkalion the Carpet King."

"What will you do with the ten million dollars?" demanded Arkalion, not minding the loss nearly so much as the ultimate disposition of his fortune.

"Why, what does anyone do with ten million dollars? Treasure it. Invest it. Spend it."

"I mean, what will you do with it if you are going in place of my—" Arkalion bit his tongue.

"Your son, were you saying, Mr. Arkalion? Alaric Arkalion the Third. Did you know that I was able to boil my list of men down to thirty when I studied their family ties?"

"Brilliant, Mr. Smith. Alaric is so young—"

"Aren't they all? Twenty-one to twenty-six. Who was it who once said something about the flower of our young manhood?"

"Shakespeare?" said Mr. Arkalion realizing that most quotes of lasting importance came from

the bard.

"Sophocles," said Smith. "But, no matter. I will take young Alaric's place for ten million dollars."

Motives always troubled Mr. Arkalion, and thus he pursued what might have been a dangerous conversation. "You'll never get a chance to spend it on the No-where Journey."

"Let me worry about that."

"No one ever returns."

"My worry, not yours."

"It is forever—as if you dropped out of existence. Alaric is so young."

"I have always gambled, Mr. Arkalion. If I do not return in five years, you are to put the money in a trust fund for certain designated individuals, said fund to be terminated the moment I return. If I come back within the five years, you are merely to give the money over to me. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"I'll want it in writing, of course."

"Of course. A plastic surgeon is due here in about ten minutes, Mr. Smith, and we can get on with . . . But if I don't know your name, how can I put it in writing?"

Smith smiled. "I changed my name to Smith for the occasion. Perfectly legal. My name is John X. Smith—now."

"That's where you're wrong," said Mr. Arkalion as the plastic

surgeon entered. "Your name is Alaric Arkalion III—*now*."

The plastic surgeon skittered around Smith, examining him minutely with the casual expertness that comes with experience.

"Have to shorten the cheek bones."

"For ten million dollars," said Smith, "you can take the damned things out altogether and hang them on your wall."

SOPHIA Androvna Petrovitch made her way downtown through the bustle of tired workers and the occasional sprinkling of Comrades. She crushed her *ersatz* cigarette underfoot at number 616 Stalin Avenue, paused for the space of five heartbeats at the door, went inside.

"What do you want?" The man at the desk was myopic but bull-necked.

Sophia showed her party card.

"Oh, Comrade. Still, you are a woman."

"You're terribly observant, Comrade," said Sophia coldly. "I am here to volunteer."

"But a woman."

"There is nothing in the law which says a woman cannot volunteer."

"We don't make women volunteer."

"I mean really volunteer, of her own free will."

"Her — own — free will?" The bull-necked man removed his spectacles, scratched his balding head with the ear-pieces. "You mean volunteer without—"

"Without coercion. I want to volunteer. I am here to volunteer. I want to sign on for the next Stalintrek."

"Stalintrek, a woman?"

"That is what I said."

"We don't force women to volunteer." The man scratched some more.

"Oh, really," said Sophia. "This is 1992, not mid-century, Comrade. Did not Premier Stalin say, 'Woman was created to share the glorious destiny of Mother Russia with her mate?'" Sophia created the quote randomly.

"Yes, if Stalin said—"

"He did."

"Still, I do not recall—"

"What?" Sophia cried. "Stalin dead these thirty-nine years and you don't recall his speeches? What is your name, Comrade?"

"Please, Comrade. Now that you remind me, I remember."

"What is your name."

"Here, I will give you the volunteer papers to sign. If you pass the exams, you will embark on the next Stalintrek, though why a beautiful young woman like you—"

"Shut your mouth and hand me those papers."

There, sitting behind that desk, was precisely why. Why should she, Sophia Androvna Petrovitch, wish to volunteer for the Stalintrek? Better to ask why a bird flies south in the winter, one day ahead of the first icy gale. Or why a lemming plunges recklessly into the sea with his multitudes of fellows, if, indeed, the venture were to turn out grimly.

But there, behind that desk, was part of the reason. The Comrade. The bright sharp Comrade, with his depth of reasoning, his fountain of gushing emotions, his worldliness. *Pfooeey!*

It was as if she had been in a cocoon all her life, stifled, starved, the cottony inner lining choking her whenever she opened her mouth, the leathery outer covering restricting her when she tried to move. No one had ever returned from the Stalintrek. She then had to assume no one would. Including Sophia Androvna Petrovitch. But then, there was nothing she would miss, nothing to which she particularly wanted to return. Not the stark, foul streets of Stalingrad, not the workers with their vapid faces or the Comrades with their cautious, sweating, trembling, fearful non-decisions, not the higher echelon of Comrades, **more** frightened but showing it less, who would love the beauty of her breasts and loins but not herself

for you never love anything but the Stalinimage and Mother Russia herself, not those terrified martinet-marionettes who would love the parts of her if she permitted but not her or any other person for that matter.

Wrong with the Stalintrek was its name alone, a name one associated with everything else in Russia for an obvious, post-Stalin reason. But everything else about the Stalintrek shrieked mystery and adventure. Where did you go? How did you get there? What did you do? Why?

A million questions which had kept her awake at night and, if she thought about them hard enough, satisfied her deep longing for something different. And then one day when stolid Mrs. Ivanovna-Rasnikov had said, "It is a joke, a terrible, terrible joke they are taking my husband Fyodor on the Stalintrek when he lacks sufficient imagination to go from here to Leningrad or even Tula. Can you picture Fyodor on the Stalintrek? Better they should have taken me. Better they should have taken his wife." That day Sophia could hardly contain herself.

As a party member she had access to the law and she read it three times from start to finish (in her dingy flat by the light of a smoking, foul-smelling, soft-

wax candle) but could find nothing barring women from the Stalintrek.

Had Fyodor Rasnikov volunteered? Naturally. Everyone volunteered, although when your name was called you had no choice. There had been no draft in Russia since the days of the Second War of the People's Liberation. Volunteer? What, precisely, did the word mean?

She, Sophia Androvna Petrovitch would volunteer, without being told. Thus it was she found herself at 616 Stalin Avenue, and thus the balding, myopic, bull-necked Comrade thrust the papers across his desk at her.

She signed her name with such vehemence and ferocity that she almost tore through the paper.

CHAPTER II

Three-score men sit in the crowded, smoke-filled room. Some drink beer, some squat in moody silence, some talk in an animated fashion about nothing very urgent. At the one small door, two guards pace back and forth slowly, creating a gentle swaying of smoke-patterns in the hazy room. The guards, in simple military uniform, carry small, deadly looking weapons.

FIRST MAN: Fight City Hall? Are you kidding? They took you,

bud. Don't try to fight it. I know. I *know*.

SECOND MAN: I'm telling you, there was a mistake in the records. I'm over twenty-six. Two weeks and two days. Already I wrote to my Congressman. Hell, that's why I voted for him, he better go to bat for me.

THIRD MAN: You think that's something? I wouldn't be here only those doctors are crazy. I mean, crazy. Me, with a cyst big as a golf ball on the base of my spine.

FIRST MAN: You too. Don't try to fight it.

FOURTH MAN: (Newly named Alaric Arkalion III) I look forward to this as a stimulating adventure. Does the fact that they select men for the Nowhere Journey once every seven hundred and eighty days strike anyone as significant?

SECOND MAN: I got my own problems.

ALARIC ARKALION: This is not a thalamic problem, young man. Not thalamic at all.

THIRD MAN: Young man? Who are you kidding?

ALARIC ARKALION: (Who realizes, thanks to the plastic surgeon, he is the youngest looking of all, with red cheeks and peach-fuzz whiskers) It is a problem of the intellect. Why seven hundred and eighty days?

FIRST MAN: I read the magazines, too, chief. You think we're all going to the planet Mars. How original.

ALARIC ARKALION: As a matter of fact, that is exactly what I think.

SECOND MAN: Mars?

FIRST MAN (Laughing) It's a long way from Mars to City Hall, doc.

SECOND MAN: You mean, through space to Mars?

ALARIC ARKALION: Exactly, exactly. Quite a coincidence, otherwise.

FIRST MAN: You're telling me.

ALARIC ARKALION: (Coldly) Would you care to explain it?

FIRST MAN: Why, sure. You see, Mars is—uh, I don't want to steal your thunder, chief. Go ahead.

ALARIC ARKALION: Once every seven hundred and eighty days Mars and the Earth find themselves in the same orbital position with respect to the sun. In other words, Mars and Earth are closest then. Were there such a thing as space travel, new, costly, not thoroughly tested, they would want to make each journey as brief as possible. Hence the seven hundred and eighty days.

FIRST MAN: Not bad, chief. You got most of it.

THIRD MAN: No one ever said anything about space travel.

FIRST MAN: You think we'd broadcast it or something, stupid? It's part of a big, important scientific experiment, only we're the hamsters.

ALARIC ARKALION: Ridiculous. You're forgetting all about the Cold War.

FIRST MAN: He thinks we're fighting a war with the Martians. (Laughs) Orson Wells stuff, huh?

ALARIC ARKALION: With the Russians. The Russians. We developed A bombs. They developed A bombs. We came up with the H bomb. So did they. We placed a station up in space, a fifth of the way to the moon. So did they. Then—nothing more about scientific developments. For over twenty years. I ask you, doesn't it seem peculiar?

FIRST MAN: Peculiar, he says.

ALARIC ARKALION: Peculiar.

SECOND MAN: I wish my Congressman . . .

FIRST MAN: You and your Congressman. The way you talk, it was your vote got him in office.

SECOND MAN: If only I could get out and talk to him.

ALARIC ARKALION: No one is permitted to leave.

FIRST MAN: Punishable by a prison term, the law says.

SECOND MAN: Oh yeah? Prison, shmision. Or else go on the Nowhere Journey. Well, I don't see

the difference.

FIRST MAN: So, go ahead. Try to escape.

SECOND MAN: (Looking at the guards) They got them all over. All over. I think our mail is censored.

ALARIC ARKALION: It is.

SECOND MAN: They better watch out. I'm losing my temper. I get violent when I lose my temper.

FIRST MAN: See? See how the guards are trembling.

SECOND MAN: Very funny. Maybe you didn't have a good job or something? Maybe you don't care. I care. I had a job with a future. Didn't pay much, but a real blue chip future. So they send me to Nowhere.

FIRST MAN: You're not there yet.

SECOND MAN: Yeah, but I'm going.

THIRD MAN: If only they let you know when. My back is killing me. I'm waiting to pull a sick act. Just waiting, that's all.

FIRST MAN: Go ahead and wait, a lot of good it will do you.

THIRD MAN: You mind your own business.

FIRST MAN: I am, doc. You brought the whole thing up.

SECOND MAN: He's looking for trouble.

THIRD MAN: He'll get it.

ALARIC ARKALION: We're go-

ing to be together a long time. A long time. Why don't you all relax?

SECOND MAN: You mind your own business.

FIRST MAN: Nuts, aren't they. They're nuts. A sick act, yet.

SECOND MAN: Look how it doesn't bother him. A failure, he was. I can just see it. What does he care if he goes away forever and doesn't come back? One bread line is as good as another.

FIRST MAN: Ha-ha.

SECOND MAN: Yeah, well I mean it. Forever. We're going away, someplace—forever. We're not coming back, ever. No one comes back. It's for good, for keeps.

FIRST MAN: Tell it to your Congressman. Or maybe you want to pull a sick act, too?

THIRD MAN: (Hits First Man, who, surprised, crashes back against a table and falls down) It isn't an act, damn you!

GUARD: All right, break it up. Come on, break it up. . .

ALARIC ARKALION: (To himself) I wish I saw that ten million dollars already—if I ever get to see it.

THEY drove for hours through the fresh country air, feeling the wind against their faces, listening to the roar their ground-jet made, all alone on the rimrock

highway.

"Where are we going, Kit?"

"Search me. Just driving."

"I'm glad they let you come out this once. I don't know what they would have done to me if they didn't. I had to see you this once. I—"

Temple smiled. He had absented himself without leave. It had been difficult enough and he might yet be in a lot of hot water, but it would be senseless to worry Stephanie. "It's just for a few hours," he said.

"Hours. When we want a whole lifetime. Kit. Oh, Kit—why don't we run away? Just the two of us, someplace where they'll never find you. I could be packed and ready and—"

"Don't talk like that. We can't."

"You want to go where they're sending you. You want to go."

"For God's sake, how can you talk like that? I don't want to go anyplace, except with you. But we can't run away, Steffy. I've got to face it, whatever it is."

"No you don't. It's noble to be patriotic, sure. It always was. But this is different, Kit. They don't ask for part of your life. Not for two years, or three, or a gamble because maybe you won't ever come back. They ask for all of you, for the rest of your life, forever, and they don't even tell you why. Kit, don't go! We'll

hide someplace and get married and—”

“And nothing.” Temple stopped the ground-jet, climbed out, opened the door for Stephanie. “Don’t you see? There’s no place to hide. Wherever you go, they’d look. You wouldn’t want to spend the rest of your life running, Steffy. Not with me or anyone else.”

“I would. I would!”

“Know what would happen after a few years? We’d hate each other. You’d look at me and say ‘I wouldn’t be hiding like this, except for you. I’m young and—’”

“Kit, that’s cruel! I would not.”

“Yes, you would, Steffy, I—” A lump rose in his throat. He’d tell her goodbye, permanently. He had to do it that way, did not want her to wait endlessly and hopelessly for a return that would not materialize. “I didn’t get permission to leave, Steffy.” He hadn’t meant to tell her that, but suddenly it seemed an easy way to break into goodbye.

“What do you mean? No—you didn’t . . .”

“I had to see you. What can they do, send me for longer than forever?”

“Then you do want to run away with me!”

“Steffy, no. When I leave you tonight, Steffy, it’s for good. That’s it. The last of Kit Temple. Stop thinking about me. I don’t exist.

I—never was.” It sounded ridiculous, even to him.

“Kit, I love you. I love you. How can I forget you?”

“It’s happened before. It will happen again.” That hurt, too. He was talking about a couple of statistics, not about himself and Stephanie.

“We’re different, Kit. I’ll love you forever. And—Kit . . . I know you’ll come back to me. I’ll wait, Kit. We’re different. You’ll come back.”

“How many people do you think said *that* before?”

“You don’t want to come back, even if you could. You’re not thinking of us at all. You’re thinking of your brother.”

“You know that isn’t true. Sometimes I wonder about Jase, sure. But if I thought there was a chance to return—I’m a selfish cuss, Steffy. If I thought there was a chance, you know I’d want you all for myself. I’d brand you, and that’s the truth.”

“You do love me!”

“I loved you, Steffy. Kit Temple loved you.”

“Loved?”

“Loved. Past tense. When I leave tonight, it’s as if I don’t exist anymore. As if I never existed. It’s got to be that way, Steffy. In thirty years, no one ever returned.”

“Including your brother, Jase.

So now you want to find him. What do I count for? What . . ."

"This going wasn't my idea. I wanted to stay with you. I wanted to marry you. I can't now. None of it. Forget me, Steffy. Forget you ever knew me. Jase said that to our folks before he was taken." Almost five years before Jason Temple had been selected for the Nowhere Journey. He'd been young, though older than his brother Kit. Young, unattached, almost cheerful he was. Naturally, they never saw him again.

"Hold me, Kit. I'm sorry . . . carrying on like this."

They had walked some distance from the ground-jet, through scrub oak and bramble bushes. They found a clearing, fragrant-scented, soft-floored still from last autumn, melodic with the chirping of nameless birds. They sat, not talking. Stephanie wore a gay summer dress, full-skirted, cut deep beneath the throat. She swayed toward him from the waist, nestled her head on his shoulder. He could smell the soft, sweet fragrance of her hair, of the skin at the nape of her neck. "If you want to say goodbye . . ." she said.

"Stop it," he told her.

"If you want to say goodbye . . ."

Her head rolled against his chest. She turned, cradled herself

in his arms, smiled up at him, squirmed some more and had her head pillowed on his lap. She smiled tremulously, misty-eyed. Her lips parted.

He bent and kissed her, knowing it was all wrong. This was not goodbye, not the way he wanted it. Quickly, definitely, for once and all. With a tear, perhaps, a lot of tears. But permanent goodbye. This was all wrong. The whole idea was to be business-like, objective. It had to be done that way, or no way at all. Briefly, he regretted leaving the encampment.

This wasn't goodbye the way he wanted it. The way it had to be. This was *auf weidersehen*.

And then he forgot everything but Stephanie . . .

"I AM Alaric Arkalion III," said the extremely young-looking man with the old, wise eyes.

How incongruous, Temple thought. The eyes look almost middle-aged. The rest of him—a boy.

"Something tells me we'll be seeing a lot of each other," Arkalion went on. The voice was that of an older man, too, belying the youthful complexion, the almost childish features, the soft fuzz of a beard.

"I'm Kit Temple," said Temple, extending his hand. "Arkalion, a

strange name. I know it from somewhere . . . Say! Aren't you—don't you have something to do with carpets or something?"

"Here and now, no. I am a number. A-92-6417. But my father is—perhaps I had better say was—my father is Alaric Arkalion II. Yes, that is right, the carpet king."

"I'll be darned," said Temple. "Why?"

"Well," Temple laughed. "I never met a billionaire before."

"Here I am not a billionaire, nor will I ever be one again. A-92-6417, a number. On his way to Mars with a bunch of other numbers."

"Mars? You sound sure of yourself."

"Reasonably. Ah, it is a pleasure to talk with a gentleman. I am reasonably certain it will be Mars."

Temple nodded in agreement. "That's what the Sunday supplements say, all right."

"And doubtless you have observed no one denies it."

"But what on Earth do we want on Mars?"

"That in itself is a contradiction," laughed Arkalion. "We'll find out, though, Temple."

They had reached the head of the line, found themselves entering a huge, double-decker jet-transport. They found two seats together, followed the instructions

printed at the head of the aisle by strapping themselves in and not smoking. Talking all around them was subdued.

"Contrariness has given way to fear," Arkalion observed. "You should have seen them the last few days, waiting around the induction center, a two-ton chip on each shoulder. Say, where *were* you?"

"I—what do you mean?"

"I didn't see you until last evening. Suddenly, you were here."

"Did anyone else miss me?"

"But I remember you the first day."

"Did anyone else miss me? Any of the officials?"

"No. Not that I know of."

"Then I was here," Temple said, very seriously.

Arkalion smiled. "By George, of course. Then you were here. Temple, we'll get along fine."

Temple said that was swell.

"Anyway, we'd better. Forever is a long time."

Three minutes later, the jet took off and soared on eager wings toward the setting sun.

"**M**EN, since we are leaving here in a few hours and since there is no way to get out of the encampment and no place to go over the desert even if you could," the microphone in the great, empty hall boomed as the

two files of men marched in, "there is no harm in telling you where you are. From this point, in a limited sense, you shall be kept abreast of your progress.

"We are in White Sands, New Mexico."

"The Garden Spot of the Universe!" someone shouted derisively, remembering the bleak hot desert and jagged mountain peaks as they came down.

"White Sands," muttered Arkalion. "It looks like space travel now, doesn't it, Kit."

Temple shrugged. "Why?"

"White sands was the center of experiments in rocketry decades ago, when people still talked about those things. Then, for a long time, no one heard anything about White Sands. The rockets grew here, Kit."

"I can readily see why. You could look all your life without finding a barren spot like this."

"Precisely. Someone once called this place—or was it some other place like it?—someone once called it a good place to throw old razor blades. If people still used razor blades."

The microphone blared again, after the several hundred men had entered the great hall and milled about among the echoes. Temple could picture other halls like this, other briefings. "Men, whenever you are given instructions, in here

or elsewhere, obey them instantly. Our job is a big one, complicated and exacting. Attention to detail will save us trouble."

Someone said, "My old man served a hitch in the army, back in the sixties. That's what he always said, attention to details. The army is crazy about things like that. Are we in the army or something?"

"This is not the army, but the function is similar," barked the microphone. "Do as you are told and you will get along."

Stirrings in the crowd. Mutterings. Temple gaped. Microphone, yes—but receivers also. placed strategically, all around the hall, to pick up sound. Telio receivers too, perhaps? It made him feel something like a goldfish.

Apparently someone liked the idea of the two-way microphones. "I got a question. When are we coming back?"

Laughter. Hooting. Catcalls.

Blared the microphone: "There is a rotation system in operation, men. When it is feasible, men will be rotated."

"Yeah, in thirty years it ain't been whatsiz—feasible—once!"

"That, unfortunately, is correct. When the situation permits, we will rotate you home."

"From where? Where are we going?"

"At least tell us that."

"Where?"

"How about that?"

There was a pause, then the microphone barked: "I don't know the answer to that question. You won't believe me, but it is the truth. No one knows where you are going. No one. Except the people who are already there."

More catcalls.

"That doesn't make sense," Arkalion whispered. "If it's space travel, the pilots would know, wouldn't they?"

"Automatic?" Temple suggested.

"I doubt it. Space travel must still be new, even if it has thirty years under its belt." If that man speaks the truth—if no one knows . . . just where in the universe *are* we going?"

CHAPTER III

"HEY, looka me. I'm flying!"
"Will you get your big fat feet out of my face?"

"Sure. Show me how to swim away through air, I'll be glad to."

"Leggo that spoon!"

"I ain't got your spoon."

"Will you look at it float away. Hey spoon, hey!"

"Watch this, Charlie. This will get you. I mean, get you."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Relax, chum."

"Leggo my leg. Help! I'm up in the air. Stop that."

"I said relax. There. Ha-ha,

lookit him spin, just like a top. All you got to do is get him started and he spins like a top with arms and legs. Top of the morning to you, Charlie. Ha-ha. I said, top of the . . ."

"Someone stop me, I'm getting dizzy."

They floated, tumbled, spun around the spaceship's lounge room in simple, childish glee. They cavorted in festive weightlessness.

"They're happy now," Arkalion observed. "The novelty of free fall, of weighing exactly nothing, strikes them as amusing."

"I think I'm getting the hang of it," said Temple. Clumsily, he made a few tentative swimming motions in the air, propelling himself forward a few yards before he lost his balance and tumbled head over heels against the wall.

Arkalion came to him quickly, in a combination of swimming and pushing with hands and feet against the wall. Arkalion righted him expertly, sat down gingerly beside him. "If you keep sudden motions to a minimum, you'll get along fine. More than anything else, that's the secret of it."

Temple nodded. "It's sort of like the first time you're on ice skates. Say, how come you're so good at it?"

"I used to read the old, theoretical books on space-travel." The words poured out effortlessly,



smoothly. "I'm merely applying the theories put forward as early as the 1950's."

"Oh." But it left Temple with some food for thought. Alaric Arkalion was a queer duck, anyway, and of all the men gathered in the spaceship's lounge, he alone had mastered weightlessness with hardly any trouble.

"Take your ice skates," Arkalion went on. "Some people put them on and use them like natural extensions of their feet the first time. Others fall all over themselves. I suppose I am lucky."

"Sure," said Temple. Actually, the only thing odd about Arkalion was his old-young face and—perhaps—his propensity for coming up with the right answers at the right times. Arkalion had seemed so certain of space-travel. He'd hardly batted an eyelash when they boarded a long, tapering, bullet-shaped ship at White Sands and thundered off into the sky. He took for granted the change-over to a huge round ship at the wheel-shaped station in space. Moments after leaving the space station—with a minimum of stress and strain, thanks to the almost-nil gravity—it was Arkalion who first swam through air to the viewport and pointed out the huge crescent earth, green and gray and brown, sparkling with patches of dazzling silver-white. "You will observe it

is a crescent," Arkalion had said. "It is closer to the sun than we are, and off at an angle. As I suspected, our destination is Mars."

THEN everyone was saying goodbye to earth. Fantastic, it seemed. There were tears, there was laughter, cursing, promises of return, awkward verbal comparisons with the crescent moon, vows of faithfulness to lovers and sweethearts. And there was Arkalion, with an avid expression in the old eyes, Arkalion with his boyish face, not saying goodbye so much as he was calling hello to something Temple could not fathom.

Now, as he struggled awkwardly with weightlessness, Temple called it his imagination. His thought-patterns shifted vaguely, without motivation, from the gleaming, polished interior of the ship with its smell of antiseptic and metal polish to the clear Spring air of Earth, blue of sky and bright of sun. The unique blue sky of Earth which he somehow knew could not be duplicated elsewhere. Elsewhere—the word itself bordered on the meaningless.

And Stephanie. The brief warm ecstasy of her—once, forever. He wondered with surprising objectivity if a hundred other names, a hundred other women were not in a hundred other minds while ev-

everyone stared at the crescent Earth hanging serenely in space—with each name and each woman as dear as Stephanie, with the same combination of fire and gentle femininity stirring the blood but saddening the heart. Would Stephanie really forget him? Did he want her to? That part of him burned by the fire of her said no—no, she must not forget him. She was his, his alone, roped and branded though a universe separated them. But someplace in his heart was the thought, the understanding, the realization that although Stephanie might keep a small place for him tucked someplace deep in her emotions, she must forget. He was gone—permanently. For Stephanie, he was dead. It was as he had told her that last stolen day. It was . . . *Stephanie, Stephanie, how much I love you . . .*

Struggling with weightlessness, he made his way back to the small room he shared with Arkalion. Hardly more than a cubicle, it was, with sufficient room for two beds, a sink, a small chest. He lay down and slept, murmuring Stephanie's name in his sleep.

HE awoke to the faint hum of the air-pumps, got up feeling rested, forgot his weightlessness and floated to the ceiling where only an outthrust arm prevented

a nasty bump on his head. He used hand grips on the wall to let himself down. He washed, aware of no way to prevent the water he splashed on his face from forming fine droplets and spraying the entire room. When he crossed back to the foot of his bed to get his towel he thrust one foot out too rapidly, lost his balance, half-rose, stumbled and fell against the other bed which, like all other items of furniture, was fastened to the floor. But his elbow struck sleeping Arkalion's jaw sharply, hard enough to jar the man's teeth.

"I'm sorry," said Temple. "Didn't mean to do that," he apologized again, feeling embarrassed.

Arkalion merely lay there.

"I said I'm sorry."

Arkalion still slept. It seemed inconceivable, for Temple's elbow pained him considerably. He bent down, examined his inert companion.

Arkalion stirred not a muscle.

Vaguely alarmed, Temple thrust a hand to Arkalion's chest, felt nothing. He crouched, rested the side of his head over Arkalion's heart. He listened, heard—nothing.

What was going on here?

"Hey, Arkalion!" Temple shook him, gently at first, then with savage force. Weightless, Arkalion's body floated up off the bed, taking the covers with it. His own

heart pounding furiously, Temple got it down again, fingered the left wrist and swallowed nervously.

Temple had never seen a dead man before. Arkalion's heart did not beat. Arkalion had no pulse.

Arkalion was dead.

Yelling hoarsely, Temple plunged from the room, soaring off the floor in his haste and striking his head against the ceiling hard enough to make him see stars. "This guy is dead!" he cried. "Arkalion is dead."

Men stirred in the companionway. Someone called for one of the armed guards who were constantly on patrol.

"If he's dead, you're yelling loud enough to get him out of his grave." The voice was quiet, amused.

Arkalion.

"What?" Temple blurted, whirling around and striking his head again. A little wild-eyed, he reentered the room.

"Now, who is dead, Kit?" demanded Arkalion, sitting up and stretching comfortably.

"Who — is dead? Who — ?" Open-mouthed, Temple stared.

A GUARD, completely at home with weightlessness, entered the cubicle briskly. "What's the trouble in here? Something about a dead man, they said."

"A dead man?" demanded Ar-

kalion. "Indeed."

"Dead?" muttered Temple, lamely and foolishly. "Dead . . ."

Arkalion smiled deprecatingly. "My friend must have been talking in his sleep. The only thing dead in here is my appetite. Weightlessness doesn't let you become very hungry."

"You'll grow used to it," the guard promised. He patted his paunch happily. "I am. Well, don't raise the alarm unless there's some trouble. Remember about the boy who cried wolf."

"Of course," said Temple. "Sure. Sorry."

He watched the guard depart.

"Bad dream?" Arkalion wanted to know.

"Bad dream, my foot. I accidentally hit you. Hard enough to hurt. You didn't move."

"I'm a sound sleeper."

"I felt for your heart. It wasn't beating. It wasn't!"

"Oh, come, come."

"Your heart was not beating, I said."

"And I suppose I was cold as a slab of ice?"

"Umm, no. I don't remember. Maybe you were. You had no pulse, either."

Arkalion laughed easily. "And am I still dead?"

"Well—"

"Clearly a case of overwrought nerves and a highly keyed imag-

ination. What you need is some more sleep."

"I'm not sleepy, thanks."

"Well, I think I'll get up and go down for breakfast." Arkalion climbed out of bed gingerly, made his way to the sink and was soon gargling with a bottle of prepared mouthwash, occasionally spraying weightless droplets of the pink liquid up at the ceiling.

Temple lit a cigarette with shaking fingers, made his way to Arkalion's bed while the man hummed tunelessly at the sink. Temple let his hands fall on the sheet. It was not cold, but comfortably cool. Hardly as warm as it should have been, with a man sleeping on it all night.

Was he still imagining things?

"I'm glad you didn't call for a burial detail and have me expelled into space with yesterday's garbage," Arkalion called over his shoulder jauntily as he went outside for some breakfast.

Temple cursed softly and lit another cigarette, dropping the first one into a disposal chute on the wall.

EVERY night thereafter, Temple made it a point to remain awake after Arkalion apparently had fallen asleep. But if he were seeking repetition of the peculiar occurrence, he was disappointed. Not only did Arkalion sleep sound-

ly and through the night, but he snored. Loudly and clearly, a wheezing snore.

Arkalion's strange feat—or his own overwrought imagination, Temple thought wryly—was good for one thing: it took his mind off Stephanie. The days wore on in endless, monotonous routine. He took some books from the ship's library and browsed through them, even managing to find one concerned with traumatic catalepsy, which stated that a severe emotional shock might render one into a deep enough trance to have a layman mistakenly pronounce him dead. But what had been the severe emotional disturbance for Arkalion? Could the effects of weightlessness manifest themselves in that way in rare instances? Temple naturally did not know, but he resolved to find out if he could after reaching their destination.

One day—it was three weeks after they left the space station, Temple realized—they were all called to assembly in the ship's large main lounge. As the men drifted in, Temple was amazed to see the progress they had made with weightlessness. He himself had advanced to handy facility in locomotion, but it struck him all the more pointedly when he saw two hundred men swim and float through air, pushing themselves

along by means of the hand-holds strategically placed along the walls.

The ever-present microphone greeted them all. "Good afternoon, men."

"Good afternoon, macl!"

"Hey, is this the way to Eb-betts' Field?"

"Get on with it!"

"Sounds like the same man who addressed us in White Sands," Temple told Arkalion. "He sure does get around."

"A recording, probably. Listen."

"Our destination, as you've probably read in newspapers and magazines, is the planet Mars."

Mutterings in the assembly, not many of surprise.

"Their suppositions, based both on the seven hundred eighty day lapse between Nowhere Journeys and the romantic position in which the planet Mars has always been held, are correct. We are going to Mars.

"For most of you, Mars will be a permanent home for many years to come—"

"Most of us?" Temple wondered out loud.

Arkalion raised a finger to his lips for silence.

"—until such time as you are rotated according to the policy of rotation set up by the government."

Temple had grown accustomed

to the familiar hoots and catcalls. He almost had an urge to join in himself.

"Interesting," Arkalion pointed out. "Back at White Sands they claimed not to know our destination. They knew it all right—up to a point. The planet Mars. But now they say that all of us will not remain on Mars. Most interesting."

"—further indoctrination in our mission soon after our arrival on the red planet. Landing will be performed under somewhat less strain than the initial takeoff in the Earth-to-station ferry, since Mars exerts less of a gravity pull than Earth. On the other hand, you have been weightless for three weeks and the change-over is liable to make some of you sick. It will pass harmlessly enough.

"We realize it is difficult, being taken from your homes without knowing the nature of your urgent mission. All I can tell you now—and, as a matter of fact, all I know—"

"Here we go again," said Temple. "More riddles."

"—is that everything *is* of the utmost urgency. Our entire way of life is at stake. Our job will be to safeguard it. In the months which follow, few of you will have any big, significant role to play, but all of you, working together, will provide the strength we need.

When the *cadre*—"

"So they call their guards teachers," Arkalion commented dryly.

"—come around, they will see that each man is strapped properly into his bunk for deceleration. Deceleration begins in twenty-seven minutes."

Mars, thought Temple, back in his room with Arkalion. *Mars*. He did not think of Stephanie, except as a man who knows he must spend the rest of his life in prison might think of a lush green field, or the cool swish of skis over fresh, powdery snow, or the sound of yardarms creaking against the wind on a small sailing schooner, or the tang of wieners roasting over an open fire with the crisp air of fall against your back, or the scent of good French brandy, or a woman.

Deceleration began promptly. Before his face was distorted and his eyes forced shut by a pressure of four gravities, Temple had time to see the look of complete unconcern on Arkalion's face. Arkalion, in fact, was sleeping.

He seemed as completely relaxed as he did that morning Temple thought he was dead.

CHAPTER IV

"PETROVITCH, S. A.!" called the Comrade standing abreast of the head of the line, a

thin, nervous man half a head shorter than the girl herself. Sophia Androvna Petrovitch strode forward, took a pair of trim white shorts from the neat stack at his left.

"Is that all?" she said, looking at him.

"Yes, Comrade. Well, a woman. Well."

Without embarrassment, Sophia had seen the men ahead of her in line strip and climb into the white shorts before they disappeared through a portal ahead of the line, depositing their clothing in a growing pile on the floor. But now it was Sophia's turn, after almost a two hour wait. Not that it was chilly, but . . .

"Is that all?" she repeated.

"Certainly. Strip and move along, Comrade." The nervous little man appraised her lecherously, she thought.

"Then I must keep some of my own clothing," she told him.

"Impossible. I have my orders."

"I am a woman."

"You are a volunteer for the Stalintrek. You will take no personal property—no clothing—with you. Strip and advance, please."

Sophia flushed slightly, while the men behind her began to call and taunt.

"I like this Stalintrek."

"Oh, yes."

"We are waiting, Comrade."

Quickly and with an objective detachment which surprised her, Sophia unbuttoned her shirt, removed it. Her one wish—and an odd one, she thought, smiling—was for wax for her ears. She loosened the three snaps of her skirt, watched it fall to the floor. She stood there briefly, lithe-limbed, a tall, slim girl, then had the white shorts over her nakedness in one quick motion. She still wore a coarse halter.

"All personal effects, Comrade," said the nervous little man.

"No," Sophia told him.

"But yes. Definitely, yes. You hold up the line, and we have a schedule to maintain. The Stalintrek demands quick, prompt obedience."

"Then you will give me one additional item of clothing."

The man looked at Sophia's halter, at the fine way she filled it. He shrugged. "We don't have it," he said, clearly enjoying himself.

In volunteering for the Stalintrek, Sophia had invaded man's domain. She had watched not with embarrassment but with scorn while the men in front of her got out of their clothing. She had invaded man's domain, and as she watched them, the short, flabby ones, the bony ones with protruding ribs and collar-bones, those of milky white skin and soft hands,

she knew most of them would bite off more than they could chew if ever they tried what was the most natural thing for men to try with a lone woman in an isolated environment. But she *was* in a man's world now, and if that was the way they wanted it, she would ask no quarter.

She reached up quickly with one hand and unfastened the halter, catching it with her free hand and holding it in front of her breasts while the nervous little man licked his lips and gaped. Sophia grabbed another pair of the white shorts, tore it quickly with her strong fingers, fashioning a crude covering for herself. This she pulled around her, fastening it securely with a knot in back.

"You'll have to give that back to me," declared the nervous little Comrade.

"I'll bet you a samovar on that," Sophia said quietly, so only the man heard her.

He reached out, as if to rip the crude halter from her body, but Sophia met him halfway with her strong, slim fingers, wrapping them around his biceps and squeezing. The man's face turned quickly to white as he tried unsuccessfully to free his arm.

"Please, that hurts."

"I keep what I am wearing." She tightened her grip, but gazed serenely into space as the man

stifled a whimper.

"Well—" the man whispered indecisively as he gritted his teeth.

"Fool!" said Sophia. "Your arm will be black and blue for a week. While you men grow soft and lazy, many of the women take their gymnastics seriously, especially if they want to keep their figures with the work they must do and the food they must eat. I am stronger than you and I will hurt you unless—" And her hand tightened around his scrawny arm until her knuckles showed white.

"Wear what you have and go," the man pleaded, and moaned softly when Sophia released his numb arm and strode through the portal, still drawing whistles and leers from the other men, who missed the by-play completely.

"SO we're on Mars!"

"It ain't Nowhere after all, it's Mars."

"Wait and see, buster. Wait and see."

"Kind of cold, isn't it? Well, if this was Venus and some of them beautiful one-armed dames was waiting for us—"

"That's just a statue, stupid."

"Lookit all them people down there, will you?"

"You think they're Martians?"

"Stupid! We ain't the first ones went on the Nowhere Journey."

"What are we waiting for? It sure will feel good to stretch your legs."

"Let's 'go!"

"Look out, Mars, here I come!"

It would have been just right for a Hollywood epic, Temple thought. The rusty ochre emptiness spreading out toward the horizon in all directions, spotted occasionally with pale green and frosty white, the sky gray with but a shade of blue in it, distant gusts of Martian wind swirling ochre clouds across the desert, the spaceship poised on its ungainly bottom, a great silver bowling ball with rocket tubes for finger holes, and the Martians from Earth who had been here on this alien world for seven-hundred-eighty days or twice seven-eighty or three times, and who fought in frenzied eagerness, like savages, to reach the descending gangplank first.

Earth chorus: Hey, Martians, any of you guys speak English? Hah-ha, I said, any of you guys...

Where are all them canals I heard so much about?

You think maybe they're dangerous? (Laughter)

No dames. Hey, no dames...

Who were you expecting, Donna Daunley?

What kind of place is Mars with no women?

What do they do here, anyway,

just sit around and wait for the next rocket?

I'm cold.

Get used to it, brother, get used to it.

Look out, Mars, here I come!

Martian chorus: Who won the Series last year, Detroit?

Hey, bud, tell me, are dames still wearing those one piece things, all colors, so you see their legs up to about here and their chests down to about here? (Gestures lewdly)

Which one of you guys can tell me what it's like to take a bath? I mean a real bath in a real bath tub.

Hey, we licked Russia yet?

We heard they were gonna send some dames!

Dames—ha-ha, you're breaking my heart.

Tell me what a steak tastes like. So thick.

Me? Gimme a bowl of steamed oysters. And a dame.

Dames. Girls. Women. Females. Chicks. Tomatoes. Frails. Dames. Dames. Dames . . .

They did not seem to mind the cold, these Earth-Martians. Temple guessed they never spent much time out of doors (above ground, for there were no buildings?) because all seemed pale and white. While the sun was weaker, so was the protection offered by a thinner atmosphere. The sun's actinic

rays could burn, and so could the sand-driving wind. But pale skins could not be the result of staying indoors, for Temple noted the lack of man-made structures at once. Underground, then. The Earth-Martians lived underground like moles. Doing what? And for what reason? With what ultimate goal, if any? And where did those men who did not remain on Mars go? Temple's head whirled with countless questions—and no answers.

Shoulder to shoulder with Arkalion, he made his way down the gangplank, turning up the collar of his jumper against the stinging wind.

"You got any newspapers, pal?"

"Magazines?"

"Phonograph records?"

"Gossip?"

"Newsfilm?"

"Who's the heavyweight champ?"

"We lick those Commies in Burma yet?"

"Step back! Watch that man. Maybe he's your replacement."

"Replacement. Ha-ha. That's good."

All types of men. All ages. In torn, tattered clothing, mostly. In rags. Even if a man seemed more well-groomed than the rest, on closer examination Temple could see the careful stitching, the patches, the fades and stains. No one seemed to mind.

"Hey, bud. What do you hear about rotation? They passed any laws yet?"

"I been here ten years. When do I get rotated?"

"Ain't that something? Dad Jenks came here with the first ship. Don't you talk about rotation. Ask Dad."

"Better not mention that word to Dad Jenks. He sees red."

"This whole damn planet is red."

"Want a guided tour of nowhere, men? Step right up."

Arkalion grinned. "They seem so well-adjusted," he said, then shuddered against the cold and followed Temple, with the others, through the crowd.

THEY were inoculated against nameless diseases. (Watch for the needle with the hook)

They were told again they had arrived on the planet Mars. (No kidding?)

Led to a drab underground city, dimly lit, dank, noisome with mold and mildew. (Quick, the chlorophyll)

Assigned bunks in a dormitory, with four men to a room. (Be it ever so humble—bah!)

Told to keep things clean and assigned temporarily to a garbage pickup detail. (For this I left Sheboygan?)

Read to from the Declaration of

Independence, the Constitution and Public Law 1182 (concerned with the Nowhere Journey, it told them nothing they did not already know).

Given as complete a battery of tests, mental, emotional and physical, as Temple ever knew existed. (Cripes, man! How the hell should I know what the cube root of -5 is? I never finished high school!)

Subjected to an exhaustive, overlong, and at times meaningless personal interview. (No, doc, honest. I never knew I had a—uh—anxiety neurosis. Is it dangerous?)

"How do you do, Temple? Sit down."

"Thank you."

"Thought you'd like to know that while your overall test score is not uncanny, it's decidedly high."

"So what?"

"So nothing—not necessarily. Except that with it you have a very well balanced personality. We can use you, Temple."

"That's why I'm here."

"I mean—elsewhere. Mars is only a way station, a training center for a select few. It takes an awful lot of administrative work to keep this place going, which explains the need for all the station personnel."

"Listen. The last few weeks I had everything thrown at me.

Everything, the works. Mind answering one question?"

"Shoot."

"What's this all about?"

"Temple, I don't know!"

"You what?"

"I know you find it hard to believe, but I don't. There isn't a man here on Mars who knows the whole story, either—and certainly not on Earth. We know enough to keep everything in operation. And we know it's important, all of it, everything we do."

"You mentioned a need for some men elsewhere. Where?"

The psychiatrist shrugged. "I don't know. Somewhere. Anywhere." He spread his hands out eloquently. "That's where the Nowhere Journey comes in."

"Surely you can tell me something more than—"

"Absolutely not. It isn't that I don't want to. I can't. I don't know."

"Well, one more question I'd like you to answer."

The psychiatrist lit a cigarette, grinned. "Say, who is interviewing whom?"

"This one I think you can tackle. I have a brother, Jason Temple. Embarked on the Nowhere Journey five years ago. I wonder—"

"So that's the one factor in your psychograph we couldn't figure out—anxiety over your brother."

"I doubt it," shrugged Temple. "More likely my fiancée."

"Umm, common enough. You were to be married?"

"Yes." *Stephanie, what are you doing now? Right now?*

"That's what hurts the most . . . Well, yes, I can find out about your brother." The psychiatrist flicked a toggle on his desk. "Jamison, find what you can on Temple, Jason, year of—"

"1987," Temple supplied.

"1987. We'll wait."

After a moment or two, the voice came through, faintly metallic: "Temple, Jason. Arrival: 1987. Psychograph, 115b12. Mental aggregate, 98. Physcom, good to excellent. Training: two years, space perception concentrate, others. Shipped out: 1989."

So Jase had shipped out for—Nowhere.

"Someday you'll follow in your brother's footsteps, Temple. Now, though, I have a few hundred questions I'd like you to answer."

The psychiatrist hadn't exaggerated. Several hours of questioning followed. Once reminded of her, Temple found it hard to keep his thought off Stephanie.

He left the psychiatrist's office more confused than ever.

"GOOD morning, child. You are Stephanie Andrews?" Stephanie hadn't felt up to

working that first morning after Kit's final goodbye. She answered the door in her bathrobe, saw a small, middle-aged woman with graying hair and a kind face. "That's right. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you. I represent the Complete Emancipation League, Miss Andrews."

"Complete Emancipation League? Oh, something to do with politics. Really, I'm not much interested in—"

"That's entirely the trouble," declared the older woman. "Too many of us are not interested in politics. I'd like to discuss the C.E.L. with you, my dear, if you will bear with me a few minutes."

"All right," said Stephanie. "Would you like a glass of sherry?"

"In the morning?" the older woman smiled.

"I'm sorry. Don't mind me. My fiance left yesterday, took his final goodbye. He—he embarked on the Nowhere Journey."

"I realize that. It is precisely why I am here. My dear, the C.E.L. does not want to fight the government. If the government decides that the Nowhere Journey is vital for the welfare of the country—even if the government won't or can't explain what the Nowhere Journey is — that's all right with us. But if the govern-

ment says there is a rotation system but does absolutely nothing about it, we're interested in that. Do you follow me?"

"Yes!" cried Stephanie. "Oh, yes. Go on."

"The C. E. L. has sixty-eight people in Congress for the current term. We hope to raise that number to seventy-five for next election. It's a long fight, a slow uphill fight, and frankly, my dear, we need all the help we can get. People—young women like yourself, my dear—are entirely too lethargic, if you'll forgive me."

"You ought to forgive *me*," said Stephanie, "if you will. You know, it's funny. I had vague ideas about helping Kit, about finding some way to get him back. Only to tackle something like that alone . . . I'm only twenty-one, just a girl, and I don't know anyone important. No one ever comes back, that's what you hear. But there's a rotation system, you also hear that. If I can be of any help . . ."

"You certainly can, my dear. We'd be delighted to have you."

"Then, eventually, maybe, just maybe, we'll start getting them rotated home?"

"We can't promise a thing. We can only try. And I never did say we'd try to get the boys rotated, my dear. There is a rotation system in the law, right there in Public Law 1182. But if no men

have ever been rotated, there must be a reason for it."

"Yes, but—"

"But we'll see. If for some reason rotation simply is not practicable, we'll find another way. Which is why we call ourselves the C.E.L. — Complete Emancipation League—for women. If men must embark on the Nowhere Journey—the least they can do is let their women volunteer to go along with them if they want to—since it may be forever. Let a bunch of women get to this Nowhere place and you'll never know what might happen, that's what I say."

Something about the gray haired woman's earthy confidence imbued Stephanie with an optimism she never expected. "Well," she said, smiling, "if we can't bring ourselves to Mohammed . . . No, that's all wrong! . . . to the mountain . . . ?"

"Yes, there's an old saying. But it isn't important. You get the idea. My dear, how would you like to go to Nowhere?"

"I—to Kit, anywhere, anywhere!" *I'll never forget yesterday, Kit darling. Never!*

"I make no promises, Stephanie, but it may be sooner than you think. Morning be hanged, perhaps I will have some sherry after all. Umm, you wouldn't by any chance have some Canadian instead?"

Humming, Stephanie dashed in to the kitchen for some glasses.

THERE were times when the real Alaric Arkalion III wished his father would mind his own business. Like that thing about the Nowhere Journey, for instance. Maybe Alaric Sr. didn't realize it, but being the spoiled son of a billionaire wasn't all fun. "I'm a dilettante," Alaric would tell himself often, gazing in the mirror, "a bored dilettante at the age of twenty-one."

Which in itself, he had to admit, wasn't too bad. But having reneged on the Nowhere Journey in favor of a stranger twice his age who now carried his, Alaric's face, had engendered some annoying complications. "You'll either have to hide or change your own appearance and identity, Alaric."

"Hide? For how long, father?"

"I can't be sure. Years, probably."

"That's crazy. I'm not going to hide for years."

"Then change your appearance. Your way of life. Your occupation."

"I have no occupation."

"Get one. Change your face, too. Your fingerprints. It can be done. Become a new man, live a new life."

In hiding there was boredom, impossible boredom. In the other

alternative there was adventure, intrigue—but uncertainty. One part of young Alaric craved that uncertainty, the rest of him shunned it. In a way it was like the Nowhere Journey all over again.

"Maybe Nowhere wouldn't have been so bad," said Alaric to his father, choosing as a temporary alternative and retreat what he knew couldn't possibly happen.

Couldn't it?

"If I choose another identity, I'd be eligible again for the Nowhere Journey."

"By George, I hadn't considered that. No, wait. You could be older than twenty-six."

"I like it the way I am," Alaric said, pouting.

"Then you'll have to hide. I spent ten million dollars to secure your future, Alaric. I don't want you to throw it away."

Alaric pouted some more. "Let me think about it."

"Fair enough, but I'll want your answer tomorrow. Meanwhile, you are not to leave the house."

Alaric agreed verbally, but took the first opportunity which presented itself—that very night—to sneak out the servants' door, go downtown, and get stewed to the gills.

At two in the morning he was picked up by the police for disorderly conduct (it had happened before) after losing a fistfight to

a much poorer, much meaner drunk in a downtown bar. They questioned Alaric at the police station, examined his belongings, went through his wallet, notified his home.

Fuming, Alaric Sr. rushed to the police station to get his son. He was met by the desk sergeant, a fat, balding man who wore his uniform in a slovenly fashion.

"Mr. Arkalion?" demanded the sergeant, picking at his teeth with a toothpick.

"Yes. I have come for Alaric, my son."

"Sure. Sure. But your son's in trouble, Mr. Arkalion. Serious trouble."

"What are you talking about? If there are any damages, I'll pay. He didn't—hurt anyone, did he?"

The sergeant broke the toothpick between his teeth, laughed. "Him? Naw. He got the hell beat out of him by a drunk half his size. It ain't that kind of trouble, Mr. Arkalion. You know what an 1182 card is, mister?"

Arkalion's face drained white. "Why—yes."

"Alaric's got one."

"Naturally."

"According to the card, he should have shipped out on the Nowhere Journey, mister. He didn't. He's in serious trouble."

"I'll see the district attorney."

"More'n likely, you'll see the

attorney general. Serious trouble."

CHAPTER V

THE trouble with the Stalin-trek, Sophia thought, was that it took months to get absolutely nowhere. There had been the painful pressure, the loss of consciousness, the confinement in this tight little world of dormitories and gleaming metal walls, the uncanny feeling of no weight, the ability—boring after a while, but interesting at first—to float about in air almost at will.

Then, how many months of sameness? Sophia had lost all track of time through *ennui*. But for the first brief period of adjustment on the part of her fellows to the fact that although she was a woman and shared their man's life she was still to be inviolate, the routine had been anything but exciting. The period of adjustment had had its adventures, its uncertainties, its challenge, and to Sophia it had been stimulating. Why was it, she wondered, that the men who carried their sex with strength and dignity, the hard-muscled men who could have their way with her if they resorted to force were the men who did not violate her privacy, while the weaklings, the softer, smaller men, or the average men whom

Sophia considered her physical equals were the ones who gave her trouble?

She had always accepted her beauty, the obvious attraction men found in her, with an objective unconcern. She had been endowed with sex appeal; there was not much room in her life to exploit it, even had she wanted to. Now, now when she wanted anything but that, it gave her trouble.

Her room was shared, of necessity, with three men. Tall, gangling Boris gave her no trouble, turned his back when she undressed for the evening, even though she was careful to slip under the covers first. Ivan, the second man, was short, thin, stooped. Often she found him looking at her with what might have been more than a healthy interest, but aside from that he kept his peace. Besides, Ivan had spent two years in secondary school (as much as Sophia) and she enjoyed conversing with him.

The third man, Georgi, was the troublemaker. Georgi was one of those plump young men with red cheeks, big, eager eyes, a voice somewhat too high. He was an avid talker, a boaster and a boor. In the beginning he showered attentions on Sophia. He insisted on drawing her wash-basin at night, escorted her to breakfast every morning, told her in confi-

dence of the conquests he had made over beautiful women (but not as beautiful as you, Sophia). He soon began to take liberties. He would sit—timorously at first, but with growing boldness—on the corner of her bed, talking with her at night after the others had retired, Ivan with his snores, Boris with his strong, deep breathing. And night after night, plump Georgi grew bolder.

He would reach out and touch Sophia, he would insist on tucking her in at night (let me be your big brother), he would awaken her in the morning with his hand heavy on her shoulder. Finally, one night at bedtime, she heard him conversing in low whispers with Ivan and Boris. She could not hear the words, but Boris looked at her with what she thought was surprise, Ivan nodded in an understanding way, and both of them left the room.

Sophia frowned. "What did you tell them, Georgi?"

"That we wanted to be alone one evening, of course."

"I never gave you any indication—"

"I could see it in your eyes, in the way you looked at me."

"Well, you had better call them back inside and go to bed."

Georgi shook his head, approached her.

"Georgi! Call them back or I

will."

"No, you won't." Georgi followed her as she retreated into a corner of the room. When she reached the wall and could retreat no further, he placed his thick hands on her shoulders, drew her to him slowly. "You will call no one," he rasped.

SHE ducked under his arms, eluded him, was on the point of running to the door, throwing it open and shouting, when she reconsidered. If she did, she would be asking for quarter, gaining a temporary reprieve, inviting the same sort of thing all over again.

She crossed to the bed and sat down. "Come here, Georgi."

"Ah." He came to her.

She watched him warily, a soft flabby man not quite so tall as she was, but who nevertheless outweighed her by thirty or forty pounds. In his eagerness, he walked too fast, lost his footing and floated gently to the ceiling. Smiling as demurely as she could, Sophia reached up, circled his ankle with her hand.

"I never could get used to this weightlessness," Georgi admitted. "Be nice and pull me down."

"I will be nice. I will teach you a lesson."

He weighed exactly nothing. It was as simple as stretching. Sophia merely extended her arm upwards

and Georgi's head hit the ceiling with a loud *thunk*. Georgi groaned. Sophia repeated the procedure, lowering her arm a foot — and Georgi with it — then raising it and bouncing his head off the ceiling.

"I don't understand," Georgi whined, trying to break free but only succeeding in thrashing his chubby arms foolishly.

"You haven't mastered weightlessness," Sophia smiled up at him. "I have. I said I would teach you a lesson. First make sure you have the strength of a man if you would play a man's game."

Still smiling, Sophia commenced spinning the hand which held Georgi's ankle. Arms and free leg flailing air helplessly, Georgi began to spin.

"Put me down!" he whined, a boy now, not even pretending to be a man. When Sophia shoved out gently and let his ankle go he did a neat flip in air and hung suspended, upside down, his feet near the ceiling, his head on a level with Sophia's shoulders. He cried.

She slapped his upside down face, carefully and without excitement, reddening the cheeks. "I was—only joking," he slobbered. "Call back our friends."

Sophia found one of the hard, air-tight metal flasks they used for

drinking in weightlessness. With one hand she opened the lid, with the other she grasped Georgi's shoulder and spun him in air, still upside down. She squirted the water in his face, and because he was upside down and yelling it made him choke and cough. When the container was empty she lowered Georgi gently to the floor.

Minutes later, she opened the door, summoned Boris and Ivan, who came into the room self-consciously. What they found was a thoroughly beaten Georgi sobbing on the floor. After that, Sophia had no trouble. Week after week of boredom followed and she almost wished Georgi or someone else would *look* for trouble . . . even if it were something she could not handle, for although she was stronger than average and more beautiful, she was still a woman first, and she knew if the right man . . .

"DID you know that radio communication is maintained between Earth and Mars?" the Alaric Arkalion on Mars asked Temple.

"Why, no. I never thought about it."

"It is, and I am in some difficulty."

"What's the matter?" Temple had grown to like Arkalion, despite the man's peculiarities. He had

given up trying to figure him out, feeling that the only way he'd get anywhere was with Arkalion's co-operation.

"It's a long story which I'm afraid you would not altogether understand. The authorities on Earth don't think I belong here on the Nowhere Journey."

"Is that so? A mistake, huh? I sure am glad for you, Alaric."

"That's not the difficulty. It seems that there is the matter of impersonation, of violating some of the clauses in Public Law 1182. You're glad for me. I'm likely to go to prison."

"If it's that serious, how come they told you?"

"They didn't. But I—managed to find out. I won't go into details, Kit, but obviously, if I managed to embark for Nowhere when I didn't have to, then I wanted to go. Right?"

"I—uh, guess so. But why—?"

"That isn't the point. I *still* want to go. Not to Mars, but to Nowhere. I still can, despite what has happened, but I need help."

Temple said, "Anything I can do, I'll be glad to," and meant it. For one thing, he liked Arkalion. For another, Arkalion seemed to know more, much more than he would ever say — unless Temple could win his confidence. For a third, Temple was growing sick and tired of Mars with its drab

ochre sameness (when he got to the surface, which was rarely), with its dank underground city, with its meaningless attention to meaningless detail. Either way, he figured there was no returning to Earth. If Nowhere meant adventure, as he suspected it might, it would be preferable. Mars might have been the other end of the galaxy for all its nearness to Earth, anyway.

"There is a great deal you can do. But you'll have to come with me."

"Where?" Temple demanded.

"Where you will go eventually. To Nowhere."

"Fine." And Temple smiled. "Why not now as well as later?"

"I'll be frank with you. If you go now, you go untrained. You may need your training. Undoubtedly, you will."

"You know a lot more than you want to talk about, don't you?"

"Frankly, yes . . . I am sorry, Kit."

"That's all right. You have your reasons. I guess if I go with you I'll find out soon enough, anyway."

Arkalion grinned. "You have guessed correctly. I am going to Nowhere, before they return me to Earth for prosecution under Public Law 1182. I cannot go alone, for it takes at least two to operate . . . well, you'll see."

"Count me in," said Temple.

"Remember, you may one day wish you had remained on Mars for your training."

"I'll take my chances. Mars is driving me crazy. All I do is think of Earth and Stephanie."

"Then come."

"Where are we going?"

"A long, long way off. It is unthinkable remote, this place called Nowhere."

Temple felt suddenly like a kid playing hookey from school. "Lead on," he said, almost jauntily. He knew he was leaving Stephanie still further behind, but had he been in prison on the next street to hers, he might as well have been a million miles away.

As for Arkalion — the thought suddenly struck Temple — Arkalion wasn't necessarily leaving his world further behind. Perhaps Arkalion was going home . . .

STEPHANIE picked up the phone eagerly. In the weeks since her first meeting with Mrs. Draper of the C.E.L., the older woman had been a fountain of information and of hope for her. Stephanie for her part had taken over Mrs. Draper's job in her own section of Center City: she was busy contacting the two hundred mothers and fifty sweethearts of the Nowhere Journey which had taken Kit from her. And now Mrs. Draper had called with informa-

tion.

"We've successfully combined forces with some of the less militant elements in both houses of Congress," Mrs. Draper told her over the phone. "Do you realize, my dear, this marks the first time the C.E.L. has managed to put something constructive through Congress? Until now we've been content merely to block legislation, such as an increase in the Nowhere contingent from . . ."

"Yes, Mrs. Draper. I know all that. But what about this constructive thing you've done."

"Well, my dear, don't count your chickens. But we *have* passed the bill, and we expect the President won't veto it. You see, the President has two nephews who . . ."

"I know. I know. What bill did you pass?"

"Unfortunately, it's somewhat vague. Ultimately, the Nowhere Commission must do the deciding, but it does pave the way."

"For what, Mrs. Draper?"

"Hold onto your hat, my dear. The bill authorizes the Nowhere Commission to make as much of a study as it can of conditions—wherever our boys are sent."

"Oh." Stephanie was disappointed. "That won't get them back to us."

"No. You're right, it won't get them back to us. That isn't the

idea at all, for there is more than one way to skin a cat, my dear. The Nowhere Commission will be studying conditions—"

"How can they? I thought everything was so hush-hush, not even Congress knew anything about it."

"That was the first big hurdle we have apparently overcome. Anyway, they will be studying conditions with a view of determining if one girl—just one, mind you—can embark on the Nowhere Journey as a pilot study and—"

"But I thought they could make the journey only once every seven-hundred-eighty days."

"Get Congress aroused and you can move mountains. It seems the expense entailed in a trip at any but those times is generally prohibitive, but when something special comes up—"

"It can be done! Mrs. Draper, how I love to talk with you!"

"See? There you go, my dear, counting your chickens. One girl will be sent, if the study indicates she can take it. *One* girl, Stephanie, and only after a study. She'd merely be a pilot case. But afterwards . . . Ah, afterwards . . . Perhaps someday soon qualified women will be able to join their men in Nowhere."

"Mrs. Draper, I love you."

"Naturally, you will tell all this to prospective C.E.L. members.



Now we have something concrete to work with."

"I know. And I will, I will, Mrs. Draper. By the way, how are they going to pick the girl, the one girl?"

"Don't count your chickens, for Heaven's sake! They haven't even studied the situation yet. Well, I'll call you, my dear."

Stephanie hung up, dressed, went about her canvassing. She thought happy thoughts all week.

"**S**HH! Quiet," cautioned Arkalion, leading the way down a flight of heavy-duty plastic stairs.

"How do you know your way around here so well?"

"I said quiet."

It was not so much, Temple realized, that Arkalion was really afraid of making noise. Rather, he did not want to answer questions.

Temple smiled in the semi-darkness, heard the steady drip-drip-drip of water off somewhere to his left. Eons before the coming of man on this stopover point to Nowhere, the Martian waters had retreated from the planet's ancient surface and seeped underground to carve, slow drop by drop, the caverns which honey-combed the planet. "You know your way around so well, I'd swear you were a Martian."

Arkalion's soft laugh carried far. "I said there was to be no noise. Please! As for the Martians, the only Martians are here all around you, the men of Earth. Ahh, here we are."

At the bottom of the flight of stairs Temple could see a door, metallic, giving the impression of strength without great weight. Arkalion paused a moment, did something with a series of levers, shook his head impatiently, started all over again.

"What's that for?" Temple wanted to know.

"What do you think? It is a combination lock, with five million possible combinations. Do you want to be here for all of eternity?"

"No."

"Then quiet."

Vaguely, Temple wondered why the door wasn't guarded.

"With a lock like this," Arkalion explained, as if he had read Temple's thought, "they need no other precaution. It is assumed that only authorized personnel know the combination."

Then had Arkalion come this way before? It seemed the only possible assumption. But when? And how? "Here we are," said Arkalion.

The door swung in toward them.

Temple strode forward, found himself in a great bare hall, surpris-

ingly well-lighted. After the dimness of the caverns, he hardly could see.

"Don't stand there scowling and fussing with your eyes. There is one additional precaution — an alarm at Central Headquarters. We have about five minutes, no more."

AT one end of the bare hall stood what to Temple looked for all the world like an old-fashioned telephone booth, except that its walls were completely opaque. On the wall adjacent to it was a single lever with two positions marked "hold" and "transport". The lever stood firmly in the "hold" position.

"You sure you want to come?" Arkalion demanded.

"Yes, I told you that."

"Good. I have no time to explain. I will enter the conveyor."

"Conveyor?"

"This booth. You will wait until the door is shut, then pull the lever down. That is all there is to it, but, as you can see, it is a two-man operation."

"But how do I—"

"Haste, haste! There are similar controls at the other end. You pull the lever, wait two minutes, enter the conveyor yourself. I will fetch you—if you are sure."

"I'm sure, dammit!"

"Remember, you go without

training, without the opportunity everyone else has."

"You already told me that. Mars is half-way to eternity. Mars is limbo. If I can't go back to Earth I want to go—well, to Nowhere. There are too many ghosts here, too many memories with nothing to do."

Arkalion shrugged, entered the booth. "Pull the lever," he said, and shut the door.

Temple reached up, grasped the lever firmly in his hand, yanked it. It slid smoothly to the position marked "transport." Temple heard nothing, saw nothing, began to think the device, whatever it was, did not work. Did Arkalion somehow get *moved* inside the booth?

Temple thought he heard footfalls on the stairs outside. Soon, faintly, he could hear voices. Someone banged on the door to the hall. Licking dry lips, Temple opened the booth, peered inside.

Empty.

The voices clamored, fists pounded on the door. Something clicked. Tumblers fell. The door to the great, bright hall sprung outward. Someone rushed in at Temple, who met him savagely with a short, chopping blow to his jaw. The man, temporarily blinded by the dazzling light, stumbled back in the path of his fellows.

Temple darted into the booth, the conveyor, and slammed it shut.

Fingers clawed on the outside.

A sound almost too intense to be heard rang in Temple's ears. He lost consciousness instantly.

CHAPTER VI

"**W**HAT a cockeyed world," said Alaric Arkalion Sr. to his son. "You certainly can't plan on anything, even if you do have more money than you'll ever possibly need in a lifetime."

"Don't feel like that," said young Alaric. "I'm not in prison any longer, am I?"

"No. But you're not free of the Nowhere Journey, either. There is an unheralded special trip to Nowhere, two weeks from today, I have been informed."

"Oh?"

"Yes, oh. I have also been informed that you will be on it. You didn't escape after all, Alaric."

"Oh. Oh!"

"What bothers me most is that scoundrel Smith somehow managed to escape. They haven't found him yet, I have also been informed. And since my contract with him calls for ten million dollars 'for services rendered,' I'll have to pay."

"But he didn't prevent me from —"

"I can't air this thing, Alaric! But listen, son: when you go where you are going, you're liable

to find another Alaric Arkalion, your double. Of course, that would be Smith. If you can get him to cut his price in half because of what has happened, I would be delighted. If you could somehow manage to wring his neck, I would be even more delighted. Ten million dollars—for nothing."

"**I**'M so excited," murmured Mrs. Draper. Stephanie watched her on one of the new televiewers, recently installed in place of the telephone.

"What is it?"

"Our bill has been passed by a landslide majority in both houses of Congress!"

"Ooo!" cried Stephanie.

"Not very coherent, my dear, but those are my sentiments exactly. In two weeks there will be a Journey to Nowhere, a special one which will include, among its passengers, a woman."

"But the study which had to be made—?"

"It's already been made. From what I gather, they can't take it very far. Most of their conclusions had to be based on supposition. The important thing, though, is this: a woman *will* be sent. The way the C.E.L. figures it, my dear, is that a woman falling in the twenty-one to twenty-six age group should be chosen, a woman who meets all the requirements

placed upon the young men."

"Yes," said Stephanie. "Of course. And I was just thinking that I would be—"

"Remember those chickens!" cautioned Mrs. Draper. "We already have one hundred seventy-seven volunteers who'd claw each other to pieces for a chance to go."

"Wrong," Stephanie said, smiling. "You now have one hundred seventy-eight."

"Room for only one, my dear. Only one, you know."

"Then cross the others off your list. I'm already packing my bag."

WHEN Temple regained consciousness, it was with the feeling that no more than a split second of time had elapsed. So much had happened so rapidly that, until now, he hadn't had time to consider it.

Arkalion had vanished.

Vanished—he could use no other word. He was there, standing in the booth—and then he wasn't. Simple as that. Now you see it, now you don't. And goodbye, Arkalion.

But goodbye Temple, too. For hadn't Temple entered the same booth, waiting but a second until Arkalion activated the mechanism at the other end? And certainly Temple wasn't in the booth now. He smiled at the ridiculously sim-

ple logic of his thoughts. He stood in an open field, the blades of grass rising to his knees, as much brilliant purple as they were green. Waves of the grass, stirred like tide by the gentle wind, and hills rolling off toward the horizon in whichever direction he turned. Far away, the undulating hills lifted to a half soft mauve sky. A somber red sun with twice Sol's apparent disc but half its brightness hung midway between zenith and horizon completing the picture of peaceful other-worldliness.

Wherever this was, it wasn't Earth—or Mars.

Nowhere?

Temple shrugged, started walking. He chose his direction at random, crushing an easily discernible path behind him in the surprisingly brittle grass. The warm sun baked his back comfortably, the soft-stirring wind caressed his cheeks. Of Arkalion he found not a trace.

Two hours later Temple reached the hills and started climbing their gentle slopes. It was then that he saw the figure approaching on the run. It took him fully half a minute to realize that the runner was not human.

AFTER months of weightless inactivity, things started to happen for Sophia. The feeling of weight returned, but weight as she

never had felt it before. It was as if someone was sitting on every inch of her body, crushing her down. It made her gasp, forced her eyes shut and, although she could not see it, contorted her face horribly. She lost consciousness, coming to some time later with a dreadful feeling of loginess. Someone swam into her vision dimly, stung her arm briefly with a needle. She slept.

She was on a table, stretched out, with lights glaring down at her. She heard voices.

"The new system is far better than testing, comrade."

"Far more efficient, far more objective. Yes."

"The brain emits electromagnetic vibration. Strange, is it not, that no one before ever imagined it could tell a story. A completely accurate story two years of testing could not give us."

"In Russia we have gone far with the biological, psychological sciences. The West flies high with physics. Give them Mars; bah, they can have Mars."

"True, Comrade. The journey to Jupiter is greater, the time consumed is longer, the cost, more expensive. But here on Jupiter we can do something they cannot do on Mars."

"I know."

"We can make supermen. Supermen, comrade. A wedding of

Nietzsche and Marx."

"Careful. Those are dangerous thoughts."

"Merely an allusion, comrade. Merely a harmless allusion. But you take an ordinary human being and train him on Jupiter, speeding his time-sense and metabolic rate tremendously with certain endocrine secretions so that one day is as a month to him. You take him and subject him to big Jupiter's pull of gravity, more than twice Earth's—and in three weeks you have, yes—you have a superman."

"The woman wakes."

"Shh. Do not frighten her."

Sophia stretched, every muscle in her body aching. Slowly, as in a dream, she sat up. It required strength, the mere act of pulling her torso upright!

"What have you done to me?" she cried, focussing her still-dim vision on the two men.

"Nothing, comrade. Relax."

Sophia turned slowly on the table, got one long shapely leg draped over its edge.

"Careful, comrade."

What were they warning her about? She merely wanted to get up and stretch; perhaps then she would feel better. Her toe touched the floor, she swung her other leg over, aware of but ignoring her nakedness.

"A good specimen."

"Oh, yes, comrade. So this time they send a woman among the others. Well, we shall do our work. Look—see the way she is formed, so lithe, loose-limbed, agile. See the toning of the muscles? Her beauty will remain, comrade, but Jupiter shall make an amazon of her."

SOPHIA had both feet on the floor now. She was breathing hard, felt suddenly sick to her stomach. Placing both her hands on the table edge, she pushed off and staggered for two or three paces. She crumpled, buckling first at the knees then the waist, and fell in a writhing heap.

"Pick her up."

Hands under her arms, tugging. She came off the floor easily, dimly aware that someone carried her hundred and thirty pounds effortlessly. "Put me down!" she cried. "I want to try again. I am crippled, crippled! You have crippled me . . ."

"Nothing of the sort, comrade. You are tired, weak, and Jupiter's gravity field is still too strong for you. Little by little, though, your muscles will strengthen to Jupiter's demands. Gravity will keep them from bulging, expanding; but every muscle fibre in you will have twice, three times its original strength. Are you excited?"

"I am tired and sick. I want

to sleep. What is Jupiter?"

"Jupiter is a planet circling the sun at—never mind, comrade. You have much to learn, but you can assimilate it with much less trouble in your sleep. Go ahead, sleep."

Sophia retched, was sick. It had been years since she cried. But naked, afraid, bewildered, she cried herself to sleep.

Things happened while she slept, many things. Certain endoctrine extracts accelerated her metabolism astonishingly. Within half an hour her heart was pumping blood through her body two hundred beats per minute. An hour later it reached its full rate, almost one thousand contractions every sixty seconds. All her other metabolic functions increased accordingly, and Sophia slept deeply for a week of subjective time—in hours. The same machine which had gleaned everything from her mind far more accurately than a battery of tests, a refinement of the electro-encephalogram, was now played in reverse, giving back to Sophia everything it had taken plus electrospool after electrospool of science, mathematics, logic, economics, history (Marxism, these last two), languages (including English), semantics and certain specialized knowledge she would need later on the Stalintrek.

Still sleeping, Sophia was bathed in a warm whirlpool of soothing

liquid; rubbed, massaged, her muscle-toning begun while she rested and regained her strength. Three hours later, objective time, she awoke with a headache and with more thoughts spinning around madly inside her brain than she ever knew existed. Gingerly, she tried standing again, lifting herself nude and dripping wet from a tub of steaming amber stuff. She stood, stretched, permitted her fright to vanish with a quick wave of vertigo which engulfed her. She had been fed intravenously, but a tremendous hunger possessed her. Before eating, however, she was to find herself in a gymnasium, the air close and stifling. She was massaged again, told to do certain exercises which seemed simple but which she found extremely difficult, forced to run until she thought she would collapse, with her legs, dragging like lead.

She understood, now. Somehow she knew she was on Jupiter, the fifth and largest planet, where the force of gravity is so much greater than on Earth that it is an effort even to walk. She also knew that her metabolic rate had been accelerated beyond all comprehension and that in a comparatively short time—objective time—she would have thrice her original strength. All this she knew without knowing how she knew,

and that was the most staggering fact of all. She did what her curt instructors bid, then dragged her aching muscles and her headache into a dining room where tired, forlorn-looking men sat around eating. Well, the food at least was good. Sophia attacked it ravenously.

IT did not take Temple long to realize that the creature running downhill at him, leaving a crushed and broken wake in the purple and green grass, was not human. At first Temple toyed with the idea of a man on horseback, for the creature ran on four limbs and had two left over as arms. Temple gaped.

The whole thing was one piece! Centaur?

Hardly. Too small, for one thing. No bigger than a man, despite the three pairs of limbs. And then Temple had time to gape no longer, for the creature, whatever it was, flashed past him at what he now had to consider a gallop.

More followed. Different. Temple stared and stared. One could have been a great, sentient hoop, rolling downhill and gathering momentum. If he carried the wheel analogy further, a huge eye stared at him from where the hub would have been. Something else followed with kangaroo leaps. One thick-

thewed leg propelled it in tremendous, fifteen-foot hopping strides while its small, flapper-like arms beat the air prodigiously.

Legions of creatures. All fantastically different. *I'm going crazy*, Temple thought, then said it aloud. "I'm going crazy."

Theorizing thus, he heard a whirl overhead, whirled, looked up. Something was poised a dozen feet off the ground, a large, box-like object seven or eight feet across, rotors spinning above it. That, at least, he could understand. A helicopter.

"I'm lowering a ladder, Kit. Swing aboard."

Arkalion's voice.

Stunned enough to accept anything he saw, Temple waited for the rope ladder to drop, grasped its end, climbed. He swung his legs over a sill, found himself in a neat little cabin with Arkalion, who hauled the ladder in and did something to the controls. They sped away. Temple had one quick moment of lucid thought before everything which had happened in the last few moments shoved logic aside. What he had observed looked for all the world like a foot-race.

"Where the hell *are* we?" Temple demanded breathlessly.

Arkalion smiled. "Where do you think? Journey's end. Welcome to Nowhere, Kit. Welcome to the

place where all your questions can be answered because there's no going back. Sorry I set you down in that field by mistake, incidentally. Those things sometimes happen."

"Can I just throw the questions at you?"

"If you wish. It isn't really necessary, for you will be indoctrinated when we get you over to Earth city where you belong."

"What do you mean, there's no going back? I thought they had a rotation system which for one reason or another wasn't practical at the moment. That doesn't sound like no going back, ever."

Arkalion grunted, shrugged. "Have it your way. I *know*."

"Sorry. Shoot."

"Just how far do you think you have come?"

"Search me. Some other star system, maybe?"

"Maybe. Clean across the galaxy, Kit."

Temple whistled softly. "It isn't something you can grasp just by hearing it. Across the galaxy . . ."

"That isn't too important just now. How long did you think the journey took?"

Temple nodded eagerly. "That's what gets me. It was amazing, Alaric. Really amazing. The whole trip couldn't have taken more than a moment or two. I don't get it. Did we slip out of normal

space into some other—uh, continuum, and speed across the length of the galaxy like that?”

“The answer to your question is yes. But your statement is way off. The journey did not take seconds, Kit.”

“No? Instantaneous?”

“Far more than seconds. To reach here from Earth you traveled five thousand years.”

“What?”

“More correctly, it was five thousand years ago that you left Mars. You would need a time machine to return, and there is no such thing. The Earth you know is the length of the galaxy and five thousand years behind you.”

CHAPTER VII

IT could have been a city in New England, or maybe Wisconsin. Main Street stretched for half a mile from Town Hall to the small department store. Neon tubing brightened every store front, busy proprietors could be seen at work through the large plate glass windows. There was the bustle you might expect on any Main Street in New England or Wisconsin, but you could not draw the parallel indefinitely.

There were only men. No women.

The hills in which the town nestled were too purple—not pur-

ple with distance but the natural color of the grass.

A somber red sun hung in the pale mauve sky.

This was Earth City, Nowhere.

Arkalion had deposited Temple in the nearby hills, promised they would see one another again. “It may not be so soon,” Arkalion had said, “but what’s the difference? You’ll spend the rest of your life here. You realize you are lucky, Kit. If you hadn’t come, you would have been dead these five thousand years. Well, good luck.”

Dead—five thousand years. The Earth as he knew it, dust. Stephanie, a fifty generation corpse. Nowhere was right. End of the universe.

Temple shuffled his feet, trudged on into town. A man passed him on the street, stooped, gray-haired. The man nodded, did a mild double-take. *I’m an unfamiliar face*, Temple thought.

“Howdy,” he said. “I’m new here.”

“That’s what I thought, stranger. Know just about everyone in these here parts, I do, and I said to myself, now there’s a newcomer. Funny you didn’t come in the regular way.”

“I’m here,” said Temple.

“Yeah. Funny thing, you get to know everyone. Eh, what you say your name was?”

“Christopher Temple.”

"Make it my business to know everyone. The neighborly way, I always say. Temple, eh? We have one here."

"One what?"

"Another fellow name of Temple. Jase Temple, son."

"I'll be damned!" Temple cried, smiling suddenly. "I will be damned. Tell me, old timer, where can I find him?"

"Might be anyplace. Town's bigger'n it looks. I tell you, though, Jase Temple's our co-ordinator. You'll find him there, the co-ordinator's office. Town Hall, down the end of the street."

"I already passed it," Temple told the old man. "And thanks."

Temple's legs carried him at a brisk pace, past the row of store fronts and down to the Town Hall. He read a directory, climbed a flight of stairs, found a door marked:

JASON TEMPLE

Earth City Co-ordinator

Heart pounding, Temple knocked, heard someone call, "Come in."

He pushed the door in and stared at his brother, just rising to face him.

"KIT! Kit! What are you doing . . . so you took the journey too!"

Jason ran to him, clasped his shoulders, pounded them. "You sure are looking fit. Kit, you

could have knocked me over with half a feather, coming in like that."

"You're looking great too, Jase," Temple lied. He hadn't seen his brother in five years, had never expected to see him again. But he remembered a full-faced, smiling man somewhat taller than himself, somewhat broader across the shoulders. The Jason he saw looked forty-five or fifty but was hardly out of his twenties. He had fierce, smouldering eyes, gaunt cheeks, graying hair. He seemed a bundle of restless, nervous energy.

"Sit down, Kit. Start talking, kid brother. Start talking and don't stop till next week. Tell me everything. Everything! Tell me about the blue sky and the moon at night and the way the ocean looks on a windy day and . . ."

"Five years," said Temple. "Five years."

"Five thousand, you mean," Jason reminded him. "It hardly seems possible. How are the folks, Kit?"

"Mom's fine. Pop too. He's sporting a new Chambers Converter. You should see him, Jase. Sharp."

"And Ann?" Jason looked at him hopefully. Ann had been Jason's Stephanie—but for the Nowhere Journey they would have married.

"Ann's married," Temple said.

"Oh. Oh. That's swell, Kit. Really swell. I mean, what the hell, a girl shouldn't wait forever. I told her not to, anyway."

"She waited four years, then met a guy and —"

"A nice guy?"

"The best," said Temple. "You'd like him."

Temple saw the vague hurt come to Jason's smouldering eyes. Then it was the same. One part of Jason wanted her to remain his over an unthinkable gap, another part wanted her to live a good, full life.

"I'm glad," said Jason. "Can't expect a girl to wait without hope . . ."

"Then there's no hope we'll ever get back?"

Jason laughed harshly. "You tell me. Earth isn't merely sixty thousand light years away. Kit, do you know what a light year is?"

Temple said he thought he did.

"Sixty thousand of them. A dozen eternities. But the Earth we know is also dead. Dead five thousand years. The folks, Center City, Ann, her husband—all dust. Five thousand years old . . . Don't mind me, Kit."

"Sure. Sure, I understand." But Temple didn't, not really. You couldn't take five thousand years and chuck them out the window in what seemed the space of a

heart beat and then realize they were gone permanently, forever. Not a period of time as long as all of recorded civilization—you couldn't take it, tack it on after 1992 and accept it. Somehow, Temple realized, the five thousand years were harder to swallow than the sixty thousand light years.

"Well," with a visible effort, Jason snapped out of his reverie. Temple accepted a cigarette gratefully, his first in a long time. *In fifty centuries*, he thought bitterly, burrowing deeper into a funk.

"Well," said Jason, "I'm acting like a prize boob. How selfish can I get? There must be an awful lot you'd like to know, Kit."

"That's all right. I was told I'd be indoctrinated."

"Ordinarily, you would. But there's no shipment now, none for another three months. Say, how the devil *did* you get here?"

"That's a long story. Nowhere Journey, same as you, with a little assist to speed things up on Mars. Jase, tell me this: what are we doing here? What is everyone doing here? What's the Nowhere Journey all about? What kind of a glorified foot-race did I see a while ago, with a bunch of creatures out of the telio science-fiction shows?"

JASON put his own cigarette out, changed his mind, lit an-

other one. "Sort of like the old joke, where does an alien go to register?"

"Sort of."

"It's a big universe," said Jason, evidently starting at the beginning of something.

"I'm just beginning to learn *how* big!"

"It would be pretty unimaginative of mankind to consider itself the only sentient form of life, Earth the only home of intelligence, both from a scientific and a religious point of view. We kind of expected to find—neighbors out in space. Kit, the sky is full of stars, most stars have planets. The universe crawls with life, all sorts of life, all sorts of intelligent life. In short, we are not alone. It would be sort of like taking the jet-shuttle from Washington to New York during the evening rush and expecting to be the only one aboard. In reality, you're lucky to get breathing space.

"There are biped intelligences, like humans. There are radial intelligences, one-legged species, tall, gangling creatures, squat ones, pancake ones, giants, dwarfs. There are green skins and pink skins and coal black—and yes, no skins. There are . . . but you get the idea."

"Uh-huh."

"Strangely enough, most of these

intelligences are on about the same developmental level. It's as if the Creator turned everything on at once, like a race, and said 'okay, guys get started.' Maybe it's because, as scientists figure, the whole universe got wound up and started working as a unit. I don't know. Anyway, that's the way it is. All the intelligences worth talking about are on about the same cultural level. Atomics, crude spaceflight, wars they can't handle.

"And this is interesting, Kit. Most of 'em are bipedal. Not really human, not fully human. You can see the difference. But seventy-five percent of the races I've encountered have had basic similarities. A case of the Creator trying to figure out the best of all possible life-patterns and coming up with this one. Offers a wide range for action, for adaptation, stuff like that. Anyway, I'm losing track of things."

"Take it easy. From what you tell me I have all the time in the world."

"Well, I said all the races are developmentally parallel. That's almost true. One of them is not. One of them is so far ahead that the rest of us have hardly reached the crawling stage by comparison. One of them is the Super Race, Kit.

"Their culture is old, incredibly old. So old, in fact, that some of

us figure it's been hanging around since before the Universe took shape. Maybe that's why all the others are on one level, a few thousand million years behind the Super Race.

"So, take this Super Race. For some reason we can't understand, it seems to be on the skids. That's just figurative. Maybe it's dying out, maybe it wants to pack up and leave the galaxy altogether, maybe it's got other undreamed of business other undreamed of places. Anyway, it wants out. But it's got an eon-old storehouse of culture and maybe it figures someone ought to have access to that and keep the galaxy in running order. But who? That's the problem. Who gets all this information, a million million generations of scientific problems, all carefully worked out? Who, among all the parallel races on all the worlds of the Universe? That's quite a problem, even for our Super Race boys.

"You'd think they'd have ways to solve it, though. With calculating machines or whatever will follow calculating machines after Earthmen and all the others find the next faltering step after a few thousand years. Or with plain horse sense and logic, developed to a point—after millions of years at it—where it never fails. Or solve the problem with something

we've never heard of, but solve it anyway."

"What's all this got to do with—? I mean, it's an interesting story and when I get a chance to digest it I'll probably start gasping, but what about Nowhere and . . ."

"I'm coming to that. Kit, what would you say if I told you that the most intelligent race the Universe has ever produced solves the biggest problem ever handed anyone—by playing games?"

"**I**'D say you better continue."
"That's the purpose of Nowhere, Kit. Every planet, every race has its Nowhere. We all come here and we play games. Planet with the highest score at the end of God knows how long wins the Universe, with all the science and the wisdom needed to fashion that universe into a dozen different kinds of heaven. And to decide all this, we play games.

"Don't get the wrong idea. I'm not complaining. If the Super-boys say we play, then we play. I'd take their word for it if they told me I had fifteen heads. But it's the sort of thing which doesn't let you get much sleep. Oh, Earth has a right to be proud of its record. United North America is in second place on a competition that's as wide as the Universe. But we're not first. Second. And I

have a hunch from what's been going on around here that the games are drawing to a close.

"Fantastic, isn't it? Out of thousands of entrants, we're good enough to place second. But some planet out near the star Deneb has us hopelessly outclassed. We might as well get the booby prize. They'll win and own the Universe—us included."

Jason had leaned forward as he spoke, and was sitting on the edge of his chair now. The room was comfortably cool, but sweat beaded his forehead, dripped from his chin.

Temple lit another cigarette, inhaling deeply. "You said the United States—North America—was second. I thought this was a planet-wide competition, planet against planet."

"Earth is the one exception I've been able to find. The Deneb planet heads the list, then comes North America. After that, the planet of a star I never heard of. In fourth place is the Soviet Union."

"I'll be damned," said Temple. "Well, okay. Mind if I store that away for future reference? I've got another question. What kind of—uh, games do we play?"

"You name it. Mental contests. Scientific problems to be worked out with laboratories built to our specifications. Emotional prob-

lems with scores of men driven neurotic or worse every year. Problems of adaptability. Responses to environmental challenge. Stamina contests. Tests of strength, of endurance. Tests to determine depths of emotion. Tests to determine objectivity in what should be an objective situation. But the way everything is organized it's almost like a giant-sized, never ending Olympic Games, complete with some cock-eyed sports events too, by the way."

"With all the pageantry, too?"

"No. But that's another story."

"Anyway, what I saw *was* a foot-race! And sorry, Jase, but I have another question."

Jason shrugged, spread his hands wide.

"How come all this talk about rotation? It isn't possible, not with a fifty century gap."

"I know. They just let us in on that little deal a couple of years ago. Till then, we didn't know. We thought it was distance only. In time, after all this was over, we could go home. That's what we thought," Jason said bitterly. "Actually, it's twice five thousand years. Five to come here, five to return. Ten thousand years separate us from the Earth we know, and even if we could go home, that wouldn't be going home at all—to Earth ten thousand

years in the future.

"Oh, they had us hoodwinked. Afraid we might say no or something. They never mentioned the length or duration of the trip. I don't understand it, none of us do and we have some top scientists here. Something to do with suspended animation, with contra-terrene matter, with teleportation, something about latent extra-sensory powers in everyone, about the ability to break down an object—or a creature or a man—to its component atoms, to reverse—that's the word, reverse — those atoms and send them spinning off into space as contra-terrene matter.

"It all boils down to putting a man in a machine on Mars, pulling a lever, materializing him here five thousand years later." Jason smiled with only a trace of humor, "Any questions?"

"About a thousand," said Temple. "I—"

SOMETHING buzzed on Jason's desk and Temple watched him pick up a microphone, say: "Co-ordinator speaking. What's up?"

The voice which answered, clear enough to be in the room with them and without the faintest trace of mechanical or electrical transfer, spoke in a strange, liquid-syllabled language Temple had never

heard. Jason responded in the same language, with an apparent ease which surprised Temple—until he remembered that his brother had always had a knack of picking up foreign languages. Maybe that was why he held the Co-ordinator's job—whatever it was he co-ordinated.

There was fluency in the way Jason spoke, and alarm. The trouble-lines etched deeply on his face stood out sharply, his eyes, if possible, grew more intense. "Well," he said, putting the mike down and staring at Temple without seeing him, "I'm afraid that does it."

"What's the trouble?"

"Everything."

"Anything I can do?"

"Item. The Superboys have discovered that Earth has two contingents here—us and the Soviets. They're mad. Item. Something will be done about it. Item. Soviet Russia has made a suggestion, or that is, its people here. They will put forth a champion to match one of our own choosing in the toughest grind of all, something to do with responding to environmental challenge, which doesn't mean a hell of a lot unless you happen to know something about it. Shall I go on?"

And, when Temple nodded avidly. "We automatically lose by default. One of the rules of that

particular game is that the contestant must be a newcomer. It's the sort of game you have to know nothing about, and incidentally, it's also the sort of game a man can get killed at. Well, the Soviets have a whole contingent of newcomers to pick from. We don't have any. As the Superboys see it, that's our own tough luck. We lose by default."

"It seems to me—"

"How can anything 'seem to you?' You're new here . . . I'm sorry Kit. What were you saying?"

"No. Go ahead."

"That's only the half of it. Right after Russia takes our place and we're scratched off the list, the games go into their final phase. That was the rumor all along, and it's just been confirmed. Interesting to see what they do with all the contestants *after* the games are over, after there's no more No-where Journey."

"We could go back where we came from."

"Ten thousand years in the future?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Well, anyway, the Soviets put up a man, we can't match him. So it looks like the U.S.S.R. represents Earth officially. Not that it matters. We hardly have the chance of a very slushy snowball in a very hot hell. But still—"

"Our contestant, this guy who meets the Russian's challenge, has to be a newcomer?"

"That's what I said. Well, we can close up shop, I guess."

"You made a mistake. You said no newcomers have arrived. I'm here, Jase. I'm your man. Bring on your Russian Bear." Temple smiled grimly.

CHAPTER VIII

"YOU got to hand it to Temple's kid brother."

"Yeah. Cool as ice cubes."

"Are you guys kidding? He doesn't know what's in store for him, that's all."

"Do *you*?"

"Now that you mention it, no. Isn't a man here who can say for sure what kind of environmental challenges he'll have to respond to. Hypno-surgery sees to it the guys who went through the thing won't talk about it. As if that isn't security enough, the subject's got to be a brand new arrival!"

"Shh! Here he comes."

The brothers Temple entered Earth City's one tavern quietly, but on their arrival all the speculative talk subsided. The long bar, built to accommodate half a hundred pairs of elbows comfortably, gleamed with a luster unfamiliar to Temple. It might have been marble, but marble translucent

rather than opaque, giving a beautiful three-dimensional effect to the surface patterns.

"What will it be?" Jason demanded.

"Whatever you're drinking is fine."

Jason ordered two scotches, neat, and the brothers drank. When Jason got a refill he started talking. "Does T.A.T. mean anything to you, Kit?"

"Tat? Umm — no. Wait a minute! T.A.T. Isn't that some kind of projective psychological test?"

"That's it. You're shown a couple of dozen pictures, more or less ambiguous, never cut and dry. Each one comes from a different stratum of the social environment, and you're told to create a dramatic situation, a story, for each picture. From your stories, for which you draw on your whole background as a human being, the psychometrician should be able to build a picture of your personality and maybe find out what, if anything, is bothering you."

"What's that to do with this response to environmental challenge thing?"

"Well," said Jason, drinking a third scotch, "the Super Boys have evolved T.A.T. to its ultimate. T.A.T.—that stands for Thematic Apperception Test. But in E.C.R.—environmental challenge and re-

sponse, you don't see a picture and create a dramatic story around it. Instead, you get thrust into the picture, the situation, and you have to work out the solution—or suffer whatever consequences the particular environmental challenge has in store for you."

"I think I get you. But it's all make believe, huh?"

"That's the hell of it," Jason told him. "No, it's not. It is and it isn't. I don't know."

"You make it perfectly clear," Temple smiled. "The red-headed boy combed his brown hair, wishing it weren't blond."

Jason shrugged. "I'm sorry. For reasons you already know, the E.C.R. isn't very clear to me—or to anyone. You're not actually in the situation in a physical sense, but it can affect you physically. You *feel* you're there, you actually live everything that happens to you, getting injured if an injury occurs . . . and dying if you get killed. It's permanent, although you might actually be sleeping at the time. So, whether it's real or not is a question for philosophy. From your point of view, from the point of view of someone going through it, it's real."

"So I become part of this—uh, game in about an hour."

"Right. You and whoever the Russians offer as your competition. No one will blame you if you want

to back out, Kit; from what you tell me, you haven't even been adequately trained on Mars."

"If you draw on the entire background of your life for this E.C.R., then you don't need training. Shut up and stop worrying. I'm not backing out of anything."

"I didn't think you would, not if you're still as much like your old man as you used to be. Kit... good luck."

THE fact that the technicians working around him were Earthmen permitted Temple to relax a little. Probably, it was planned that way, for entering the huge white cube of a building and ascending to the twelfth level on a moving ramp Temple had spotted many figures, not all of them human. If he had been strapped to the table by unfamiliar aliens, if the scent of alien flesh—or non-flesh—had been strong in the room, if the fingers—or appendages—which greased his temples and clamped an electrode to each one had not felt like human fingers, if the men talking to him had spoken in voices too harsh or too sibilant for human vocal chords—if all that had been the case whatever composure still remained his would have vanished.

"I'm Dr. Olson," said one white-gowned figure. "If any injuries occur while you lie here, I'm per-

mitted to render first aid."

"The same for limited psychotherapy," said a shorter, heavier man. "Though a fat lot of good it does when we never know what's bothering you, and don't have the time to work on it even if we did know."

"In short," said a third man who failed to identify himself, "you may consider yourself as the driver of one of those midget rocket racers. Do they still have them on Earth? Good. You are the driver, and we here in this room are the mechanics waiting in your pit. If anything goes wrong, you can pull out of the race temporarily and have it repaired. But in this particular race there is no pulling out: all repairs are strictly of a first-aid nature and must be done while you continue whatever you are doing. If you break your finger and find a splint appearing on it miraculously, don't say you weren't warned."

"Best of luck to you, young man," said the psycho-therapist.

"Here we go," said the doctor, finding the large vein on the inside of Temple's forearm and plunging a needle into it.

Temple's senses whirled instantly, but as his vision clouded he thought he saw a large, complex device swing down from the ceiling and bathe his head in warming radiation. He blinked, squinted,

could see nothing but a swirling, cloudy opacity.

APPROXIMATELY two seconds later, Sophia Androvna Petrovitch watched as the white-gowned comrade tied a rubber strap around her arm, waited for the vein to swell with blood, then forced a needle in through its thick outer layer. Was that a nozzle overhead? No, rather a lens, for from it came amber warmth . . . which soon faded, with everything else, into thick, churning fog . . .

Temple was abruptly aware of running, plunging headlong and blindly through the fiercest storm he had ever seen. Gusts of wind whipped at him furiously. Rain cascaded down in drenching torrents. Foliage, brambles, branches struck against his face; mud sucked at his feet. Big animal shapes lumbered by in the green gloom, as frightened by the storm as was Temple.

His head darted this way and that, his eyes could see the gnarled tree trunks, the dense greenery, the lianas, creepers and vines of a tropical rain forest — but dimly. Green murk swirled in like thick smoke with every gust of wind, with the rain obscuring vision almost completely.

Temple ran until his lungs burned and he thought he must exhale fire. His leaden feet

fought the mud with growing difficulty for every stride he took. He ran wildly and in no set direction, convinced only that he must find shelter or perish. Twice he crashed bodily into trees, twice stumbled to his knees only to pull himself upright again, sucking air painfully into his lungs and cutting out in a fresh direction.

He ran until his legs balked. He fell, collapsing first at the knees, then the waist, then flopping face down in the mud. Something prodded his back as he fell and reaching behind him weakly Temple was aware for the first time that a bow and a quiver of arrows hung suspended from his shoulders by a strong leather thong. He wore nothing but a loin cloth of some nameless animal skin and he wondered idly if he had slain the animal with the weapon he carried. Yet when he tried to recollect he found he could not. He remembered nothing but his frantic flight through the rain forest, as if all his life he had run in a futile attempt to leave the rain behind him.

Now as he lay there, the mud sucking at his legs, his chest, his armpits, he could not even remember his name. Did he have one? Did he have a life before the rain forest? Then why did he forget?

A sense not fully developed in man and called intuition by those who fail to understand it made

him prop his head up on his hands and squint through the downpour. There was something off there in the foliage . . . someone . . .

A woman.

Temple's breath caught in his throat sharply. The woman stood half a dozen paces off, observing him coolly with hands on flanks. She stood tall and straight despite the storm and from trim ankles to long, lithe legs to flaring loin-clothed hips, to supple waist and tawny skin of fine bare breasts and shoulders, to proud, haughty face and long dark hair loose in the storm and glistening with rain, she was magnificent. Her long, bronzed body gleamed with wetness and Temple realized she was tall as he, a wild beautiful goddess of the jungle. She was part of the storm and he accepted her—but strangely, with the same fear the storm evoked. She would make a lover the whole world might relish (what world, Temple thought in confusion?) but she would make a terrible foe.

And foe she was . . .

"I want your bow and arrows," she told him.

TEMPLE wanted to suggest they share the weapon, but somehow he knew in this world which was like a dream and could tell him things the way a dream would and yet was vividly real,

that the woman would share nothing with anybody.

"They are mine," Temple said, climbing to his knees. He remembered the animal-shapes lumbering by in the storm and he knew that he and the animals would both stalk prey when the storm subsided and he would need the bow and arrows.

The woman moved toward him with a liquid motion beautiful to behold, and for the space of a heartbeat Temple watched her come. "I will take them," she said.

Temple wasn't sure if she could or not, and although she was a woman he feared her strangely. Again, it was as if something in this dream-world real-world could tell him more than he should know.

Making up his mind, Temple sprang to his feet, whirled about and ran. He was plunging through the wild storm once more, blinded by the occasional flashes of jagged green lightning, deafened by the peals of thunder which followed. And he was being pursued.

Minutes, hours, more than hours—for an eternity Temple ran. A reservoir of strength he never knew he possessed provided the energy for each painful step and running through the storm seemed the most natural thing in the world to him. But there came a time when his strength failed, not slowly, but

with shocking suddenness. Temple fell, crawled a ways, was still.

It took him minutes to realize the storm no longer buffeted him, more minutes to learn he had managed to crawl into a cave. He had no time to congratulate himself on his good fortune, for something stirred outside.

"I am coming in," the woman called to him from the green murk.

Temple strung an arrow to his bow, pulled the string back and faced the cave's entrance squatting on his heels. "Then your first step shall be your last. I'll shoot to kill." And he meant it.

Silence from outside. Deafening.

Temple felt sweat streaming under his armpits; his hands were clammy, his hands trembled.

"You haven't seen the last of me," the woman promised. After that, Temple knew she was gone. He slept as one dead.

When Temple awoke, bright sunlight filtered in through the foliage outside his cave. Although the ground was a muddy ruin, the storm had stopped. Edging to the mouth of the cave, Temple spread the foliage with his hands, peered cautiously outside. Satisfied, he took his bow and arrows and left the cave, pangs of hunger knotting his stomach painfully.

The cave had been weathered in the side of a short, steep abutment a dozen paces from a gushing, swol-

len stream. Temple followed the course of the stream as it twisted through the jungle, ranging half a mile from his cave until the water course widened to form a water-hole. All morning Temple waited there, crouching in the grass, until one by one, the forest animals came to drink. He selected a small hare-like thing, notched an arrow to his bow, let it fly.

The animal jumped, collapsed, began to slink away into the undergrowth, dragging the arrow from its hindquarters. Temple darted after it, caught it in his hands and bashed its life out against the bole of a tree. Returning to his cave he found two flinty stones, shredded a fallen branch and nursed the shards dry in the strong sunlight. Soon he made a fire and ate.

IN the days which followed, Temple returned to the water-hole and bagged a new catch every time he ventured forth. Things went so well that he began to range further and further from his cave exploring. Once however, he returned early to the water-hole and found footprints in the soft mud of its banks.

The woman.

That she had been observing him while he had hunted had never occurred to Temple, but now that the proof lay clearly before

his eyes, the old feeling of uncertainty came back. And the next day, when he crept stealthily to the water-hole and saw the woman squatting there in the brush, waiting for him, he fled back to his cave.

The thought hit him suddenly. If she were stalking him, why must he flee as from his own shadow? There would be no security for either of them until either one or the other were gone—and gone meant dead. Then Temple would do his own stalking.

For several nights Temple hardly slept. He could have found the water-hole blindfolded merely by following the stream. Each night he would reach the hole and work, digging with a sharp stone, until he had fashioned a pit fully ten feet deep and six feet across. This he covered with branches, twigs, leaves and finally dirt.

When he returned in the morning he was satisfied with his work. Unless the woman made a careful study of the area, she would never see the pit. All that day Temple waited with his back to the water-hole, facing the camouflaged pit, the trap he had set, but the woman failed to appear. When she also did not come on the second day, he began to think his plan would not work.

The third day, Temple arrived with the sun, sat as before in the

tall grass between the pit and the water-hole and waited. Several paces beyond his hidden trap he could see the tall trees of the jungle with vines and creepers hanging from their branches. At his back, a man's length behind him was the water-hole, its deepest waters no more than waist-high.

Temple waited until the sun stood high in the sky, then was fascinated as a small antelope minced down to the water-hole for a drink. *You'll make a fine breakfast tomorrow, he thought, smiling.*

Something, that strange sixth sense again, made Temple turn around and stand up. He had time for a brief look, a hoarse cry.

The woman had been the cleverer. She had set the final trap. She stood high up on a branch of one of the trees beyond the hidden pit and for an instant Temple saw her fine figure clearly, naked but for the loincloth. Then the soft curves became spring-steel.

The woman arched her body there on the high branch, grasping a stout vine and rocking back with it. Temple raised his bow, set an arrow to let it fly. But by then, the woman was in motion.

Long and lithe and graceful, she swung down on her vine, gathering momentum as she came. Her feet almost brushed the lip of Temple's pit at the lowest arc of her flight, but she clung to the

vine and it began to swing up again like a pendulum — toward Temple.

At the last moment he hunched his shoulder and tried to raise his arms for protection. The woman was quicker. She gathered her legs up under her, still clutching the vine with her slim, strong hands. The vine's arc carried her up at him; her knees were at a level with his head and she brought them up savagely, close together striking Temple brutally at the base of his jaw. Temple screamed as his head was jerked back with terrible force.

The bow flew from his fingers and he fell into the water-hole, flat on his back.

Sophia let the vine carry her out over the water, then dropped from it. Waist deep, she waded to where the man lay, unconscious on his back, half in, half out of the shallowest part of the water. She reached him, prodded his chest with her foot. When he did not stir, she rocked her weight down gracefully on her long leg, forcing his head under water. With a haughty smile, she watched the bubbles rise . . .

IN the small room where Temple's body lay in repose on a table the white-smocked doctor looked at the psychotherapist questioningly. "What's happening?"

"Can't tell, doctor. But—"

Suddenly Temple's still body rocked convulsively, his neck stretched, his head shot up and back. Blood trickled from his mouth.

The doctor thrust out expert hands, examined Temple's jaw dexterously.

"Broken?" the psychotherapist demanded in a worried voice.

"No. Dislocated. He looks like he's been hit by a sledge hammer, wherever he is now, whatever's happening. This E.C.R. is the damndest thing."

Temple's still form shuddered convulsively. He began to gasp and cough, obviously fighting for breath. An ugly blue swelling had by now lumped the base of his jaw.

"What's happening?" demanded the psychotherapist.

"I can't be sure," said the doctor, shaking his head. "He seems to have difficulty in breathing... it's as if he were—drowning."

"Bad. Anything we can do?"

"No. We wait until this particular sequence ends." The doctor examined Temple again. "If it doesn't end soon, this man will die of asphyxiation."

"Call it off," the psychotherapist pleaded. "If he dies now Earth will be represented by Russia. Call it off!"

Someone entered the room. "I have the authority," he said, se-

lecting a hypodermic from the doctor's rack and piercing the skin of Temple's forearm with it. "This first test has gone far enough. The Russian entry is clearly the winner, but Temple must live if he is to compete in another."

The wracking convulsions which shook Temple's body subsided. He ceased his choking, began to breathe regularly. With grim swiftness, the doctor went to work on Temple's dislocated jaw while the man who had stopped the contest rendered artificial respiration.

The man was Alaric Arkalion.

THE Comrade Doctor was exultant. "Jupiter training, comrade, has given us a victory."

"How can you be sure?"

"Our entrant is unharmed, the contest has been called. Wait... she is coming to."

Sophia stretched, rubbed her bruised knees, sat up.

"What happened, Comrade?" the doctor demanded.

"My knees ache," said Sophia, rubbing them some more. "I—I killed him, I think. Strange, I never dreamed it would be that real."

"In a sense, it *was* real. If you killed the American, he will stay dead."

"Nothing mattered but that world we were in, a fantastic

place. Now I remember everything, all the things I couldn't remember then."

"But your — ah, dream — what happened?"

Sophia rubbed her bruised knees a third time, ruefully. "I knocked him unconscious with these. I forced his head under water and drowned him. But — before I could be sure I finished the job—I came back . . . Funny that I should want to kill him without compunction, without reason." Sophia frowned, sat up. "I don't think I want anymore of this."

The doctor surveyed her coldly. "This is your task on the Stalin-trek. This you will do."

"I killed him without a thought."

"Enough. You will rest and get ready for the second contest."

"But if he's dead—"

"Apparently he's not, or we would have been informed, Comrade Petrovitch."

"That is true," agreed the second man, who had remained silent until now. "Prepare for another test, Comrade."

Sophia was on the point of arguing again. After all it wasn't fair. If in the dream-worlds which were not dream worlds she was motivated by but one factor and that to destroy the American and if she faced him with the strength of her Jupiter training it would hardly be a contest. And now that

she could think of the American without the all-consuming hatred the dream world had fostered in her, she realized he had been a pleasant-looking young man, quite personable, in fact. *I could like him*, Sophia thought and hoped fervently she had not drowned him. Still, if she had volunteered for the Stalintrek and this was the job they assigned her . . .

"I need no rest," she told the doctor, hardly trusting herself, for she realized she might change her mind. "I am ready any time you are."

CHAPTER IX

HIS name was Temple and it was the year 1960. Hectic end of a decade, 1960. Ancient Joe Stalin was still alive, drugged half senseless against the tortures of an incurable stomach cancer, although the world thought he died in 1953. He would hang on grimly another year and a half, yielding the reins of empire to stout Malenkov who in the space of a few years would lose them to a crafty school-teacherish whiplash called Beria. 1960—eleventh year of the fantastic Korean situation, in which the Land of the Morning Sun had become, with no pretensions to the contrary, a glorified training camp for the armies of both sides.

The Cold War flared hot in Bur-

ma by mid-1960. Indo-China was a Red Fortress and with Tibet hopelessly behind the Iron Curtain, India awoke to the fact that neutrality was an impossibility in the era of pushbuttonry, lending her chaotic bulk to the West. Mao Tse Tung fell before an assassin's bullet in Peking, but a shining new political sewage system cleared the streets of celebration before it fairly got under way. Inside of forty-eight hours, China had a new Red boss — imported from Moscow.

For some reason, it took until 1960 for the first batch of Hiroshima-Nagasaki mutants not to miscarry, and Sunday Supplement editors had a field day with the pathetic little creatures, one of which was born with two heads and actually survived for ten years. In 1960 the first manned spaceship reached Luna, but the public knew nothing of this for another fourteen months. In the United States the increase in taxes and prices was matched everywhere except in the pocketbook of the white collar worker by an increase in wages. Shortages in all branches of engineering forced the government to subsidize engineering students and exempt them permanently from the draft and the soon-to-be-started Nowhere Journey, while engineers' salaries rose to match those of top business executives.

Big news in the world of sports was the inclusion in the baseball Major Leagues of eight teams from the Pacific Coast, replacing the World Series with what was to become a mathematician's nightmare, the Triangle Game.

But Christopher Temple had his own problems. He had his own life, too, which had nothing to do with the life of the real Christopher Temple, departed thirty-odd years later on the Nowhere Journey. Or rather, this *was* Christopher Temple, living his second E.C.R. . . . Temple who had lost once, and who, if he lost again, would take the dreams and hopes of the Western world down into the dust of defeat with him. But as the fictional (although in a certain sense, real) Christopher Temple of 1960, he knew nothing of this.

The world could go to pot. The world was going to pot, anyway. Temple shuddered as he poured a fourth Canadian, downing it in a tasteless, burning gulp. Temple was a thermo-nuclear engineer with government subsidized degrees from three universities including the fine new one at Desert Rock. Temple was a thermo-nuclear engineer with top-secret government clearance. Temple was a thermo-nuclear engineer with more military secrets buzzing around inside his head than in a warehouse

of burned Pentagon files.

Temple was also a thermo-nuclear engineer whose wife spied for the Russians.

HE'D found out quite by accident, not meaning to eavesdrop at all. Returning home early one afternoon because the production engineer called a halt while further research was done on certain unstable isotopes, Temple was surprised to find his wife had a gentleman caller. He heard their voices clearly from where he stood out in the sun-parlor, and for a ridiculous instant he was torn between slinking upstairs and ignoring them altogether or barging into the living room like a high school boy flushed with jealousy. The mature thing to do, of course, was neither, and Temple was on the point of walking politely into the living room, saying hello and waiting for an introduction, when snatches of the conversation stopped him cold.

"Silly Charles! Kit doesn't suspect a thing. I would *know*."

"How can you be sure?"

"Intuition."

"On a framework of intuition you would place the fate of Red Empire?"

"Empire, Charles?" Temple could picture Lucy's raised eyebrow. He listened now, hardly breathing. For one wild moment

he thought he would retreat upstairs and forget the whole thing. Life would be much simpler that way. A meaningless surrender to unreality, however, and it couldn't be done.

"Yes, Empire. Oh, not the land-grabbing, slave-dominating sort of things the Imperialists used to attempt, but a more subtle and hence more enduring empire. Let the world call us Liberator, we shall have Empire."

Lucy laughed, a sound which Temple loved. "You may keep your ideology, Charles. Play with it, bathe in it, get drunk on it or drown yourself in it. I want my money."

"You are frank."

Temple could picture Lucy's shrug. "I am a paid, professional spy. By now you have most of the information you need. I shall have the rest tonight."

"I'll see you in hell first!" Temple cried in rage, stalking into the room and almost smiling in spite of the situation when he realized how melodramatic his words must sound.

"Kit! Kit . . ." Lucy raised hand to mouth, then backed away flinching as if she had been struck.

"Yeah, Kit. A political cuckold, or does Charles get other services from you as well?"

"Kit, you don't . . ."

The man named Charles mo-

tioned for silence. Dapper, clean-cut, good-looking except for a surly, pouting mouth, he was a head shorter than either Temple or Lucy. "Don't waste your words, Sophia. Temple overheard us."

Sophia? thought Temple. "Sophia?" he said.

Charles nodded coolly. "The real Mrs. Temple was observed, studied, her every habit and whim catalogued by experts. A plastic surgeon, a psychologist, a sociologist, a linguist, a whole battery of experts molded Sophia here into a new Mrs. Temple. I must congratulate them, for you never suspected."

"Lucy?" Temple demanded dully. Reason stood suspended in a limbo of objective acceptance and subjective disbelief.

"Mrs. Temple was eliminated. Regrettable because we don't deal in senseless mayhem, but necessary."

Temple was not aware of leaving limbo until he felt the bruising contact of his knuckles with Charles' jaw. The short man toppled, fell at his feet. "Get up!" Temple cried, then changed his mind and tensed himself to leap upon the prone figure.

"Hold it," Charles told him quietly, wiping blood from his lips with one hand, drawing an automatic from his pocket with the other. "You'd better freeze,

Temple. You die if you don't."

TEMPLE froze, watched Charles slither away across the high-piled green carpet until, safely away across the room, he came upright groggily. He turned to the dead Lucy's double. "What do you think, Sophia?"

"I don't know. We could get out of here, probably get along without the final information."

"That isn't what I mean. Naturally, we'll never receive the final facts. I mean, what do you think about Temple?"

Sophia said she didn't know.

"Left alone, he would go to the police. Kidnapped, he would be worse than useless. Harmful, actually, for the authorities would suspect something. Even worse if we killed him. The point is, we don't want the authorities to think Temple gave information to anybody."

"Gave is hardly the word," said Sophia. "I was a good wife, but also a good gleaner. One hundred thousand dollars, Charles."

"You bitch," Temple said.

"Later," Charles told the woman. "The solution is this, Sophia: we must kill Temple, but it must look like suicide."

Sophia frowned in pretty concern. "Do we have to . . . kill him?"

"What's the matter, my dear?

Have you been playing the wifely role too long? If Temple stands in the way of Red Empire, Temple must die."

Temple edged forward.

"Uh-uh," said Charles, "mustn't." He waved the automatic and Temple subsided.

"Is that right?" Sophia demanded. "Well, you listen to me. I have nothing to do with your Red Empire. I fled the Iron Curtain, came here to live voluntarily—"

"Do you really think it was on a voluntary basis that you went? We allowed you to go, Sophia. We encouraged it. That way, the job of our technicians was all the simpler. Whether you like it or not, you have been a cog in the machine of Red Empire."

"I still don't see why he has to die."

"Leave thinking to those who can. You have a smile, a body, a certain way with men. I will think. I think that Temple should die."

"I don't," Sophia said.

"We're delaying needlessly. The man dies." And Charles raised his automatic, sufficiently irked to forget his suicide plan.

A gap of eight or nine feet separated the two men. It might as well have been infinity—and it would be soon, for Temple. He saw Charles' small hand tighten about the automatic, saw the trigger finger grow white. The wea-

pon pointed at a spot just above his navel and briefly he found himself wondering what it would feel like for a slug to rip into his stomach, burning a path back to his spine. He decided to make the gesture at least, if he could do no more. He would jump for Charles.

Sophia beat him to it—and because Lucy was dead and Sophia looked exactly like her and Temple could not quite accept the fact, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Cat-quick, Sophia leaped upon Charles' back and they went down together in a twisting, thrashing tangle of arms and legs.

Temple did not wait for an invitation. He launched himself down after them, and then things began to happen . . . fast.

Sophia rolled clear, rose to her hands and knees, panting. Charles sat up cursing, nursing a badly scratched face. Temple hurtled at him, stretched him on his back again, began to pound hard fists into his face.

Charles did not have the automatic. Neither did Temple.

Something exploded against the back of Temple's head violently, throwing him off Charles and tumbling him over. Dimly he saw Sophia following through, the automatic in her hand, butt foremost. Temple's senses reeled. He

tried to rise, succeeded only in a kind of shuddering slither before he subsided. He wavered between consciousness and unconsciousness, heard as in a dream snatches of conversation.

"Shoot him . . . shoot him!"

"Shut up . . . I have . . . gun . . . go to hell."

" . . . kill . . . only way."

"My way is different . . . out of here . . . discuss later."

" . . . feel . . . "

"I said . . . out of here . . . "

The voices became a meaningless liquid torrent cascading into a black pit.

NOW Temple sat with a water-glass a third full of Canadian in his hand, every once in a while reaching up gingerly to explore the bruised swelling on his head, the blood-matted hair which covered it. To be a cuckold was one thing, but to be the naive, political pawn sort of cuckold who is not a cuckold at all, he told himself, is far worse. To live with his woman, eat the meals she cooked for him, talk to her, think she understood him, sympathize with him, to make love to her with passion while she responds with play-acting for a hundred thousand dollar salary was suddenly the most emasculating thing in the world for Temple. He had not thought to ask how long it had been going on.

Better, perhaps, if he never knew. And somewhere lost in the maze of his thoughts was the grimmest, bleakest reality of them all: Lucy was dead. Lucy — dead. But where did Lucy leave off, where did Sophia begin? Was Lucy dead that night they returned more than a little drunk from the Chamber's party, that night they danced in the living room until dawn obscured the stars and he carried Lucy upstairs. Lucy or Sophia? And the day they motored to the lake, their secret lake, hardly more than a dammed, widened stream and dreamed of the things they could do when the Cold War ended? Lucy — or Sophia? Had he ever noticed a difference in the way Lucy-Sophia cooked, in the way she spoke, the way she let him make love to her? He thought himself into a man-sized headache and found no answers. This way at least the loss of his wife was not as traumatic as it might have been. He knew not when she died or how and, in fact, Lucy-Sophia seemed so much like the real thing that he did not know where he could stop loving and start hating.

And the girl, the Russian girl, had saved his life. Why? He couldn't answer that one either, unless if it were as Charles suggested: Sophia had studied Lucy so carefully, had learned her likes and dislikes, her wants and de-

sires, had memorized and practised every quirk of her character to such an extent that Sophia was Lucy in essence.

Which, Temple thought, would make it all the harder to seek out Sophia and kill her.

That was the answer, the only answer. Temple felt a dull ache where his heart should have been, a pressure, a pounding, an unpleasant, unfamiliar lack of feeling. If he took his story to the F.B.I. he had no doubt that Charles, Sophia and whoever else worked this thing with them would be caught, but he, Temple, would find himself with a lifelong, unslakable emotional thirst. He had to quench it now and then feel sorry so that he might heal. He had to quench it with Sophia's blood . . . alone.

HE found her a week later at their lake. He had looked everywhere and had about given up, almost, in fact, ready to turn his story over to the police. But he had to think and their lake was the place for that.

Apparently Sophia had the same idea. Temple parked on the highway half a mile from their lake, made his way slowly through the woods, golden dappled with sunlight. He heard the waters gushing merrily, heard the sounds of some small animal rushing off through the woods. He saw Sophia.

She lay on their sunning rock in shorts and halter, completely relaxed, an opened magazine face down on the rock beside her, a pair of sunglasses next to it. She had one knee up, one leg stretched out, one forearm shielding her eyes from the sun, one arm down at her side. Seeing her thus, Temple felt the pressure of his automatic in its holster under his arm. He could draw it out, kill her before she was aware of his presence. Would that make him feel better? Five minutes ago, he would have said yes. Now he hesitated. Kill her, who seemed as completely Lucy as he was Temple? Send a bullet ripping through the body which he had known and loved, or the body that had seemed so much like it he had failed to tell the difference?

Murder—Lucy?

"No," he said aloud. "Her name is Sophia."

The girl sat up, startled. "Kit," she said.

"Lucy."

"You can't make up your mind, either." She smiled just like Lucy.

Dumbly, he sat down next to her on the rock. Strong sunlight had brought a fine dew of perspiration to the bronzed skin of her face. She got a pack of cigarettes out from under the magazine, lit one, offered it to Temple, lit another and smoked it. "Where

do we go from here?" she wanted to know.

"I—"

"You came to kill me, didn't you? Is that the only way you can ever feel better, Kit?"

"I—" He was going to deny it, then think.

"Don't deny it. Please." She reached in under his jacket, withdrawing her hand with the snub-nosed automatic in it. "Here," she said, giving it to him.

He took the gun, hefted it, let it fall, clattering, on the rock.

"Listen," she said. "I could have told you I was Lucy. If I said now that I am Lucy and if I kept on saying it, you'd believe me. You'd believe me because you'd want to."

"Well," said Temple.

"I am not Lucy. Lucy is dead. But . . . but I was Lucy in everything but being Lucy. I thought her thoughts, dreamed her dreams, loved her loves."

"You killed her."

"No. I had nothing to do with that. She was killed, yes. Not by me. Kit, if I asked you when Lucy stopped, and . . . when I began, could you tell me?"

He had often thought about that. "No," he said truthfully. "You're as much my wife as—she was."

SHE clutched at his hand impulsively. Then, when he

failed to respond, she withdrew her own hand. "Then—then I *am* Lucy. If I am Lucy in every way, Lucy never died."

"You betrayed me. You stood by while murder was committed. You are guilty of espionage."

"Lucy loved you. I am Lucy..."

"... Betrayed me..."

"For a hundred thousand dollars. For the chance to live a normal life, for the chance to forget Leningrad in the wintertime, watery potato soup, rags for clothing, swaggering commissars, poverty, disease. Do you think I realized I could fall in love with you so completely? If I did, don't you think that would have changed things? I am not Sophia, Kit. I was, but I am not. They made me Lucy. Lucy can't be dead, not if I am she in every way."

"What can we do?"

"I don't know. I only want to be your wife..."

"Well, then tell me," he said bitterly. "Shall I go back to the plant and continue working, knowing all the time that our most closely guarded secret is in Russian hands and that my wife is responsible?" He laughed. "Shall I do that?"

"Your secrets never went anywhere."

"Shall I... *what?*"

"Your secrets never went anywhere. Charles is dead. I have de-

stroyed all that we took. I am not Russian any longer. American. They made me American. They made me Lucy. I want to go right on being Lucy, your wife."

Temple said nothing for a long time. He realized now he could not kill her. But everything else she suggested... "Tell me," he said. "Tell me, how long have you been Lucy? You've got to tell me that."

"How long have we been married?"

"You know how long. Three years."

Sophia crushed her cigarette out on the rock, wiped perspiration (tears?) from her cheek with the back of her hand. "You have never known anyone but me in your marriage bed, Kit."

"You—you're lying."

"No. They did what they did on the eve of your marriage. I have been your wife for as long as you have had one."

Temple's head whirled. It had been a quick courtship. He had known Lucy only two weeks in those hectic post-graduate days of 1957. But for fourteen brief days, it was Sophia he had known all along.

"Sophia, I—"

"There is no Sophia, not any more."

He had hardly known Lucy, the real Lucy. This girl here was his

wife, always had been. Had the first fourteen days with Lucy been anything but a dream? He was sorry Lucy had died—but the Lucy he had thought dead was Sophia, very much alive.

He took her in his arms, almost crushing her. He held her that way, kissed her savagely, letting passion of a different sort take the place of murder.

This is my woman, he thought, and awoke on his white pallet in Nowhere.

“I AM awake,” said Temple.
“We see that. You shouldn’t be.”

“No?”

“No. There is one more dream.”

Temple dozed restfully but was soon aware of a commotion. Strangely, he did not care. He was too tired to open his eyes, anyway. Let whatever was going to happen, happen. He wanted his sleep.

But the voice persisted.

“This is highly irregular. You came in here once and—”

“I did you a favor, didn’t I?”
(That voice is familiar, Temple thought.)

“Well, yes. But what now?”

“Temple’s record is now one and one. In the second sequence he was the victor. The Soviet entry had to extract certain information from him and turn it over to her

people. She extracted the information well enough but somehow Temple made her change her mind. The information never went anywhere. How Temple managed to play counterspy I don’t know, but he played it and won.”

“That’s fine. But what do you want?”

“The final E.C.R. is critical.”
(The voice was Arkalion’s!) “How critical, I can’t tell you. Sufficient though, if you know that you lose no matter how Temple fares. If the Russian woman defeats Temple, you lose.”

“Naturally.”

“Let me finish. If Temple defeats the Russian woman, you also lose. Either way, Earth is the loser. I haven’t time to explain what you wouldn’t understand anyway. Will you cooperate?”

“Umm-mm. You did save Temple’s life. Umm-mm, yes. All right.”

“The third dream sequence is the wrong dream, the wrong contest with the wrong antagonist at the wrong time, when a far more important contest is brewing . . . with the fate of Earth as a reward for the victor.”

“What do you propose?”

“I will arrange Temple’s final dream. But if he disappears from this room, don’t be alarmed. It’s a dream of a different sort. Temple won’t know it until the dream

progresses, you won't know it until everything is concluded, but Temple will fight for a slave or a free Earth."

"Can't you tell us more?"

"There is no time, except to say that along with the rest of the Galaxy, you've been duped. The Nowhere Journey is a grim, tragic farce.

"Awaken, Kit!"

Temple awoke into what he thought was the third and final dream. Strange, because this time he knew where he was and why, knew also that he was dreaming, even remembered vividly the other two dreams.

"**S**TEALTH," said Arkalion, and led Temple through long, white-walled corridors. They finally came to a partially open door and paused there. Peering within, Temple saw a room much like the one he had left, with two white-gowned figures standing anxiously over a table. And prone on the table was Sophia, whom Temple had loved short moments before, in his second dream. Moments? Years. (Never, except in a dream.)

"She's lovely," Arkalion whispered.

"I know." Like himself, Sophia was garbed in a loose jumper and slacks.

"Stealth," said Arkalion again.

"Haste." Arkalion disappeared.

"Well," Temple told himself. "What now? At least in the other dreams I was thrust so completely into things, I knew what to do." He rubbed his jaw grimly. "Not that it did much good the first time."

Temple poked the partially-ajar door with his foot, pushing it open. The two white-smocked figures had their backs to him, leaned intently over the table and Sophia. Without knowing what motivated him, Temple leaped into the room, grasped the nearer figure's arm, whirled him around. Startled confusion began to alter the man's coarse features, but his face went slack when Temple's fist struck his jaw with terrible strength. The man collapsed.

The second man turned, mouthing a stream of what must have been Russian invective. He parried Temple's quick blow with his left hand, crossing his own right fist to Temple's face and almost ending the fight as quickly as it had started. Temple went down in a heap and was vaguely aware of the Russian's booted foot hovering over his face. He reached out, grabbed the boot with both hands, twisted. The man screamed and fell and then they were rolling over and over, striking each other with fists, knees, elbows, gouging, butting, cursing. Temple found

the Russian's throat, closed his hands around it, applied pressure. Fists pounded his face, nails raked him, but slowly he succeeded in throttling the Russian. When Temple got to his feet, trembling, the Russian stared blankly at the ceiling. He would go on staring that way until someone shut his eyes.

Not questioning the incomprehensible, Temple knew he had done what he must. Hardly seeking for the motive he could not find he lifted the unconscious Sophia off the table, slung her long form across his shoulder, plodded with her from the room. Arkalion had said haste. He would hurry.

He next was aware of a spaceship. Remembering no time lag, he simply stood in the ship with Arkalion. And Sophia.

HE knew it was a spaceship because he had been in one before and although the sensation of weightlessness was not present, they were in deep space. Stars you never see through an obscuring atmosphere hung suspended in the viewports. Cold-bright, not flickering against the plush blackness of deep space, phalanxes and legions of stars without numbers, in such wild profusion that space actually seemed three dimensional.

"This is a different sort of dream," said Sophia in English. "I remember. I remember every-

thing. Kit—"

"Hello." He felt strangely shy, became mildly angry when Arkalion hardly tried to suppress a slight snicker. "Well, that second dream wasn't our idea," Temple protested. "Once there, we acted . . . and—"

"And . . ." said Sophia.

"And nothing," Arkalion told them. "You haven't time. This is a spaceship, not like the slow, blumblng craft your people use to reach Mars or Jupiter."

"Our people?" Temple demanded. "Not yours?"

"Will you let me finish? Light is a laggard crawler by comparison with the drive propelling this ship. Temple, Sophia, we are leaving your Galaxy altogether."

"Is that a fact?" said Sophia, her Jupiter-found knowledge telling her they were traveling an unthinkable distance. "For some final contest between us, no doubt, to decide whether the U.S.S.R. or the U. S. represents Earth? Kit, I l-love you, but . . ."

"But Russia is more important, huh?"

"No. I didn't say that. All my training has been along those lines, though, and even if I'm aware it is indoctrination, the fact still remains. If your country is truly better, but if I have seen your country only through the eyes of Pravda, how can I . . . I don't

know, Kit. Let me think."

"You needn't," said Arkalion, smiling. "If the two of you would let me get on with it you'd see this particular train of thought is meaningless, quite meaningless." Arkalion cleared his throat.

"Strange, but I have much the same problem as Sophia has. My indoctrination was far more subtle though. Far more convincing, based upon eons of propaganda methods. Temple, Sophia, those who initiated the Nowhere Journey for hundreds of worlds of your galaxy did so with a purpose."

"I know. To decide who gets their vast knowledge."

"Wrong. To find suitable hosts in a one-way relationship which is hardly symbiosis, really out and out parasitism."

"What?"

And Sophia: "What are you talking about?"

"The sick, decadent, tired old creatures you consider your superiors. Parasites. They need hosts in order to survive. Their old hosts have been milked dry, have become too highly specialized, are now incapable physically or emotionally of meeting a wide variety of environmental challenges. The Nowhere Journey is to find a suitable new host. They have found one. You of Earth."

"I don't understand," Temple said, remembering the glowing ac-

counts of the 'superboys' he had been given by his brother Jason. "I just don't get it. How can we be duped like that? Wouldn't someone have figured it out? And if they have all the power everyone says, there isn't much we can do about it, anyway."

Arkalion scowled darkly. "Then write Earth's obituary. You'll need one."

"Go ahead," Sophia told Arkalion. "There's more you want to say."

"All right. Temple's thought is correct. They have tremendous power. That is why you could be duped so readily. But their power is not concentrated here. These much-faster-than-light ships are an extreme rarity, for the power-drive no longer exists. Five ships in all, I believe. Hardly enough to invade a planet, even for them. It takes them thousands of years to get here otherwise. Thousands. Just as it took me, when I came to Mars and Earth in the first place."

"What?" cried Temple. "You . . ."

"I am one of them. Correct. I suppose you would call me a subversive, but I have made up my mind. Parasitism is unsatisfactory, when the Maker got us started on symbiosis. Somewhere along the line, evolution took a wrong turn. We are—monsters."

"What do you look like?" Sophia demanded while Temple stood there shaking his head and muttering to himself.

"YOU couldn't see me, I am afraid. I was the representative here to see how things were going, and when my people found you of the Earth divided yourselves into two camps they realized they had been considering your abilities in halves. Put together, you are probably the top culture of your galaxy."

"So, we win," said Temple.

"Right and wrong. You lose. Earthmen will become hosts. Know what a back-seat driver is, Temple? You would be a back seat driver in your own body. Thinking, feeling, wanting to make decisions, but unable to. Eating when the parasite wants to, sleeping at his command, fighting, loving, living as he wills it. And perishing when he wants a new garment. Oh, they offer something in return. Their culture, their way of life, their scientific, economic, social system. It's good, too. But not worth it. Did you know that their economic struggle between democratic capitalism and totalitarian communism ended almost half a million years ago? What they have now is a system you couldn't even understand."

"Well," Temple mused, "even if

everything you said were true—"

"Don't tell me you don't believe me?"

"If it were true and we wanted to do something about it, what could we do?"

"Now, nothing. Nothing but delay things by striking swiftly and letting fifty centuries of time perform your rearguard action. Destroy the one means your enemy has of reaching Earth within foreseeable time and you have destroyed his power to invade for a hundred centuries. He can still reach Earth, but the same way you journeyed to Nowhere. Ten thousand years of space travel in suspended animation. You saw me that way once, Temple, and wondered. You thought I was dead, but that is another story.

"Anyway, let my people invade your planet, ten thousand years hence. If Earth takes the right direction, if democracy and free thought and individual enterprise win over totalitarian standardization as I think they will, your people will be more than a match for the decadent parasites who may or may not have sufficient initiative to cross space the slow way and attempt invasion in ten thousand years."

"Ten thousand?" said Temple.

"Five from Earth to Nowhere. The distance to my home is far greater, but the rate of travel can

be increased. Ten thousand years."

"Tell me," Temple demanded abruptly, "is this a dream?"

Arkalion smiled. "Yes and no. It is not a dream like the others because I assure you your bodies are not now resting on a pair of identical white tables. Still in the other dreams physical things could happen to you, while now you'll find you can do things as in a dream. For example, neither one of you knows the intricacies of a spaceship, yet if you are to save your planet, you must know the operation of the most intricate of all space ships, a giant space station."

"Then we're not dreaming?" asked Temple.

"I never said that. Consider this sequence of events about half way between the dream stage you have already seen and reality itself. Remember this: you'll have to work together; you'll have to function like machines. You will be handling totally alien equipment with only the sort of knowledge which can be played into your brains to guide you."

Sophia sighed. "Being an American, Kit is too much of an individual to help in such a situation."

Temple snorted. "Being a cog in a simple, state-wide machine is one thing—orienting yourself in a totally new situation is another."

"Yes, well—"

"See?" Arkalion cautioned. "See? Already you are arguing, but you must work together completely, with **not** the slightest conflict between you. As it is, you hardly have a chance."

"What about you?" said Sophia practically. "Can't you help?"

ARKALION shook his head. "No. While I'd like to see you come out of this thing on top, I would not like to sacrifice my life for it—which is exactly what I'd do if I remained with you and you lost.

"So, let's get down to detail. Imagine space being folded, imagine your time sense slowing, imagine a new dimension which negates the need for extensive linear travel, imagine anything you want—but we are in the process of moving nine hundred thousand light years through deep space. There is a great galaxy at that distance, almost a twin of your Milky Way: you call it the Andromeda Nebula. Closer to your own system are the two Magellanic Clouds, so called, something else which you table NGC 6822, and finally the Triangulum Galaxy. All have billions of stars, but none of the stars have life. To find life outside your galaxy you must seek it across almost a million light years. My people live in Andromeda.

"Guarding the flank of their

galaxy and speeding through inter-galactic space at many light years per minute is what you might call a space station—but on a scale you've never dreamed of. Five of your miles in diameter, it is a fortress of terrible strength, a storehouse of half a million years of weapon development. It has been arranged that the one man running this station—

"Just one?" Temple asked.

"Yes. You will see why when you get there. It has been arranged that he will leave, ostensibly on a scouting expedition. You see, I am not alone in this venture. At any rate, he will report that the space station has been taken—as, indeed, it will be, by the two of you. The only ships capable of overtaking your station in its flight will be the only ships capable of reaching your galaxy before cultural development gives you a chance to survive. They will attack you. You will destroy them—or be destroyed yourselves. Any questions?"

The whole thing sounded fantastic to Temple. Could the fate of all Earth rest on their shoulders in a totally alien environment? Could they be expected to win? Temple had no reason to doubt the former, as wild as it sounded. As for the latter, all he could do was hope. "Tell me," he said, "how will we learn the use of all the

weapons you claim are at our disposal?"

"Can you answer that for him, Sophia?" Arkalion wanted to know.

"Umm, I think so. The same way I had all sorts of culture crammed into me on Jupiter."

"Precisely. Only take it from me our refinement is far better, and the amount you have to learn actually is less."

"What I'd like to know—" Sophia began.

"Forget it. I want some sleep and you'll learn everything that's necessary at the space station."

And after that, ply Arkalion as they would with questions, he slumped down in his chair and rested. Temple could suddenly understand and appreciate. He felt like curling up into a tight little ball himself and sleeping until everything was over, one way or the other.

CHAPTER X

"IT'S all so big! So incredible! We'll never understand it! Never . . ."

"Relax, Sophia. Arkalion said—"

"I know what Arkalion said, but we haven't learned anything yet."

Hours before, Arkalion had landed them on the space station, a gleaming, five-mile in diameter

globe, and had quickly departed. Soon after that they had found themselves in a veritable labyrinth of tunnels, passageways, vaults. Occasionally they passed a great glowing screen, and always the view of space was the same. Like a magnificent, elongated shield, sparkling with a million million points of light, pale gold, burnished copper, blue of glacial ice and silver white, the Andromeda Galaxy spanned space from upper right to lower left. Off at the lower right hand corner they could see their space station; apparently the viewer itself stood far removed in space, projecting its images here at the globe.

Awed the first time they had seen one of the screens, Temple said, "All the poets who ever wrote a line would have given half their lives to see this as we see it now."

"And all the writers, musicians, artists . . ."

"Anyone who ever thought creatively, Sophia. How can you say it's breathtaking or anything like that when words weren't ever spoken which can . . ."

"Let's not go poetic just yet," Sophia admonished him with a smile. "We'd better get squared away here, as the expression goes, before it's too late."

"Yes . . . Hello, what's this?" A door irised open for them in a solid wall of metal. Irised was the

only word Temple could think of, for a tiny round hole appeared in the wall spreading evenly in all directions with a slow, uniform, almost liquid motion. When it was large enough to walk through, they entered a completely bare room and Temple whirled in time to see the entrance irising shut.

"Something smells," said Sophia, sniffing at the air.

Sweet and cloying, the odor grew stronger. Temple may have heard a faint hissing sound. "I'm getting sleepy," he said.

Nodding, Sophia ran, banged on the wall where the door had opened so suddenly, then closed. No response. "Is it a trap?"

"By whom? For what?" Temple found it difficult to keep his eyes from closing. "Fight it if you want, Sophia. I'm going to sleep." And he squatted in the center of the floor, staring vacantly at the bare wall.

Just as Temple was drifting off into a dream about complex machinery he did not yet understand but realized he soon would, Sophia joined him the hard way, collapsing alongside of him, unconscious and sprawling gracelessly on the floor.

Temple slept.

"**S**LEEPY-HEAD, get up." Sophia stirred as he spoke and shook her. She yawned,

stretched, smiled up at him lazily. "How do you feel now?"

"Hungry, Kit."

"That's a point. It's all right now, though. I know exactly where the food concentrates are kept. Three levels below us, second segment of the wall. You can make those queer doors iris by pressing the wall twice, with about a one second interval."

They found the food compartment, discovered row on row of cans, boxes, jars. Temple opened one of the cans, gazed in disappointment on a sorry looking thing the size of his thumb. Brown, shriveled, dry and almost flaky, it might have been a bird.

Sophia turned up her nose. "If that's the best this place has to offer, I'm not so hungry anymore."

Suddenly, she gaped. So did Temple. A savory odor attracted their attention, steam rising from the small can added to their interest. Amazing things happened to the withered scrap of food on exposure to the air. Temple barely had time to extract it from the can, burning his fingers in the process, when it became twice the can's size. It grew and by the time it finished, it was as savory looking a five pound fowl as Temple had ever seen. Roasted, steaming hot, ready to eat.

They tore into it with savage gusto.

"Stephanie should see me now," Temple found himself saying and regretted it.

"Stephanie? Who's that?"

"A girl."

"Your girl?"

"What's the difference? She's a million light years and fifty centuries away."

"Answer me."

"Yes," said Temple, wishing he could change the subject. "My girl." He hadn't thought of Stephanie in a long time, perhaps because it was meaningless to think of someone dead fifty centuries. Now that the thoughts had been stirred within him, though, he found them poignantly pleasant.

"Your girl . . . and you would marry her if you could?"

He had grown attached to Sophia, not in reality, but in the second of their dream worlds. He wished the memory of the dream had not lingered for it disturbed him. In it he had loved Sophia as much as he now loved Stephanie although the one was obtainable and the other was a five-thousand year pinch of dust. And how much of the dream lingered with him, in his head and his heart?

"Let's forget about it," Temple suggested.

"No. If she were here today and if everything were normal, would you marry her?"

"Why talk about what can't be?"

"I want to know, that's why."

"All right. Yes, I would. I would marry Stephanie."

"Oh," said Sophia. "Then what happened in the dream meant . . . nothing."

"We were two different people," Temple said coolly, then wished he hadn't for it was only half-true. He remembered everything about the dream—which-was-more-than-a-dream vividly. He had been far more intimate with Sophia, and over a longer period of time, than he had ever been with Stephanie. And even if Stephanie appeared impossibly on the spot and he spent the rest of his life as her husband, still he would never forget his dream-life with Sophia. In time he could let himself tell her that. But not now; now the best thing he could do would be to change the subject.

"I see," Sophia answered him coldly.

"No, you don't. Maybe some day you will."

"There's nothing but what you told me. I see."

"No . . . forget it," he told her wearily.

"Of course. It was only a dream anyway. The dream before that I almost killed you out of hatred anyway. Love and hate, I guess they neutralize. We're just a

couple of people who have to do a job together, that's all."

"For gosh sakes, Sophia! That isn't true. I loved Stephanie. I still would, were Stephanie alive. But she's—she's about as accessible as the Queen of Sheba."

"So? There's an American expression—you're carrying a torch."

Probably, Temple realized, it was true. But what did all of that have to do with Sophia? If he and Sophia . . . if they . . . would it be fair to Sophia? It would be exactly as if a widower remarried, with the memory of his first wife set aside in his heart . . . no, different, for he had never wed Stephanie, and always in him would be the desire for what had never been.

"Let's talk about it some other time," Temple almost pleaded, wanting the respite for himself as much as for Sophia.

"No. We don't have to talk about it ever. I won't be second best, Kit. Let's forget all about it and do our job. I—I'm sorry I brought the whole thing up."

Temple felt like an unspeakable heel. And, anyway, the whole thing wasn't resolved in his mind. But they couldn't just let it go at that, not in case something happened when the ships came and one or both of them perished. Awkwardly, for now he felt self-conscious about everything, he got

his arms about Sophia, drew her to him, placed his lips to hers.

That was as far as he got. She wrenched free, shoved clear of him. "If you try that again, you will have another dislocated jaw."

Temple shrugged wearily. If anything were to be resolved between them, it would be later.

When the ships came moments afterwards—seven, not the five Arkalion predicted—they were completely unprepared.

TEMPLE spotted them first on one of the viewing screens, half way between the receiver and the space station itself, silhouetted against the elongated shield of Andromeda. They soared out of the picture, appeared again minutes later, zooming in from the other direction in two flights of four ships and three.

"Come on!" Sophia cried over her shoulder, irising the door and plunging from the room. Temple followed at her heels but her Jupiter trained muscles pushed her lithe legs in long, powerful strides and soon she outdistanced him. By the time he reached the armaments vault, breathless, she was seated at the single gun-emplacement, her fingers on the controls.

"Watch the viewing screen and tell me how we're doing," Sophia told him, not taking her eyes from the dials and levers.

Temple watched, fascinated, saw a thin pencil of radiant energy leap out into space, missing one of the ships by what looked like a scant few miles. He called the corrective azimuth to her, hardly surprised by the way his mind had absorbed and now could use its new-found knowledge.

Temple understood and yet did not understand. For example, he knew the station had but one gun and Sophia sat at it now, yet in certain ways it didn't make sense. Could it cover all sectors of space? His mind supplied the answer although he had not been aware of the knowledge an instant before: yes. The space station did not merely rotate. Its surface was a spherical projection of a moving Möbius strip and although he tried to envision the concept, he failed. The weapon could be fired at any given point in space at twenty second intervals, covering every other conceivable point in the ensuing time.

Sophia was firing again and Temple watched the thin beam leap across space. "Hit!" he roared. "Hit!"

Something flashed at the front end of the lead ship. The light blinded him, but when he could see again only six ships remained in space—casting perfect shadows on the Andromeda Galaxy! The source of light, Temple realized

triumphantly, was out of range, but he could picture it—a glowing derelict of a ship, spewing heat, light and radioactivity into the void.

"One down," Sophia called. "Six to go. I like your American expressions. Like sitting ducks —"

She did not finish. Abruptly, light flared all around them. Something shrieked in Temple's ears. The vault shuddered, shook. Girders clattered to the floor, stove it in, revealing black rock. Sophia was thrown back from the single gun, crashing against the wall, flipping in air and landing on her stomach.

Temple ran to her, turned her over. Blood smeared her face, trickled from her lips. Although she did not move, she wasn't dead. Temple half dragged, half carried her from the vault into an adjoining room. He stretched her out comfortably as he could on the floor, ran back into the vault.

Molten metal had collected in one corner of the room, crept sluggishly toward him across the floor, heating it white-hot. He skirted it, climbed over a twisted girder, pushed his way past other debris, found himself at the gun emplacement.

"How dumb can I get?" Temple said aloud. "Sophia ran to the gun, must have assumed I set

up the shields." Again, it was an item of information stored in his mind by the wisdom of the space station. Protective shields made it impossible for anything but a direct hit on the emplacement to do them any harm, only Temple had never set the shields in place. He did so now, merely by tripping a series of levers, but glancing at a dial to his left he realized with alarm that the damage possibly had already been done. The needle, which measured lethal radiation, hovered half way between negative and the critical area marked in red and, even as Temple watched it, crept closer to the red.

HOW much time did he have? Temple could not be sure, bent grimly over the weapon. It was completely unfamiliar to his mind, completely unfamiliar to his fingers. He toyed with it, released a blast of radiant energy, whirled to face the viewing screen. The beam streaked out into the void, clearly hundreds of miles from its objective.

Cursing, Temple tried again, scoring a near miss. The ships were trading a steady stream of fire with him now, but with the shielding up it was harmless, striking and then bouncing back into space. Temple scored his first hit five minutes after sitting down at the gun, whooped triumphantly

and fired again. Five ships left.

But the dial indicated an increase in radioactivity as newly created neutrons spread their poison like a cancer. Behind Temple, the vault was a shambles. The pool of molten metal had increased in size, almost cutting off any possibility of escape. He could jump it now, Temple realized, but it might grow larger. Consolidating its gains now, it had sheared a pit in the floor, had commenced vaporizing the rock below it, hissing and lapping with white-hot insistence.

Something boomed, grated, boomed again and Temple watched another girder bounce off the floor, dip one end into the molten pool and clatter out a stub. Apparently the damage was extensive; a structural weakness threatened to make the entire ceiling go.

Temple fired again, got another ship. He could almost feel death breathing on his shoulder, in no great hurry but sure of its prize. He fired the weapon.

If one ship remained when they could no longer use the gun, they would have failed. One ship might make the difference for Earth. One . . .

Three left. Two.

They raked the space station with blast after blast—futilely. They spun and twisted and streaked by, offering poor targets. Temple waited his chance . . . and

glanced at the dial which measured radioactivity. He yelped, stood up. The needle had encroached upon the red area. Death to remain where he was more than a moment or two. Not quick death, but rather slow and lingering. He could do what he had to, then perish hours later. His life—for Earth? If Arkalion had known all the answers, and if he could get both ships and if there weren't another alternative for the aliens, the parasites . . . Temple stabbed out with his pencil beam, caught the sixth ship, then saw the needle dip completely into the red. He got up trembling, stepped back, half tripped on the stump of a girder as his eyes strayed in fascination to the viewing screen. The seventh ship was out of range, hovering off in the void somewhere, awaiting its chance. If Temple left the gun the ship would come in close enough to hit the emplacement despite its protective shielding. Well, it was suicide to remain there—especially when the ship wasn't even in view.

Temple leaped over the molten pool and left the vault.

HE found Sophia stirring, sitting up.

"What hit me?" she said, and laughed. "Something seems to have gone wrong, Kit . . . what . . . ?"

"It's all right now," he told her, lying.

"You look pale."

"You got one. I got five. One ship to go."

"What are you waiting for?" And Sophia sprang to her feet, heading for the vault.

"Hold it!" Temple snapped. "Don't go in there."

"Why not. I'll get the last ship and—"

"*Don't go in there!*" Temple tugged at her arm, pulled her away from the vault and its broken door which would not iris closed any more.

"What's the matter, Kit?"

"I—I want to finish the last one myself, that's all."

Sophia got herself loose, reached the circular doorway, peered inside. "Like Dante's *Inferno*," she said. "You told me nothing was the matter. Well, we can get through to the emplacement, Kit."

"No." And again he stopped her. At least he had lived in freedom all his life and although he was still young and did not want to die, Sophia had never known freedom until now and it wouldn't be right if she perished without savoring its fruits. He had a love, dust fifty centuries, he had his past and his memories. Sophia had only the future. Clearly, if someone had to yield life, Temple would do it.

"It's worse than it looks," he told her quietly, drawing her back from the door again. He explained what had happened, told her the radioactivity had not quite reached critical point—which was a lie. "So," he concluded, "we're wasting time. If I rush in there, fire, and rush right out everything will be fine."

"Then let me. I'm quicker than you."

"No. I—I'm more familiar with the gun." Dying would not be too bad, if he went with reasonable certainty he had saved the Earth. No man ever died so importantly, Temple thought briefly, then felt cold fear when he realized it would be dying just the same. He fought it down, said: "I'll be right back."

Sophia looked at him, smiling vaguely. "Then you insist on doing it?"

When he nodded she told him, "Then,—kiss me. Kiss me now, Kit—in case something . . ."

Fiercely, he swept her to him, bruising her lips with his. "Sophia, Sophia . . ."

At last, she drew back. "Kit," she said, smiling demurely. She took his right hand in her left, held it, squeezed it. Her own right hand she suddenly brought up from her waist, fist clenched, driving it against his jaw.

Temple fell, half stunned by

the blow, at her feet. For the space of a single heartbeat he watched her move slowly toward the round doorway, then he had clambered to his feet, running after her. He got his arms on her shoulders, yanked at her.

When she turned he saw she was crying. "I—I'm sorry, Kit. You couldn't fool me about . . . Stephanie. You can't fool me about this." She had more leverage this time. She stepped back, bringing her small, hard fist up from her knees. It struck Temple squarely at the point of the jaw, with the strength of Jovian-trained muscle behind it. Temple's feet left the floor and he landed with a thud on his back. His last thought of Sophia—or of anything, for a while—made him smile faintly as he lost consciousness. For a kiss she had promised him another dislocated jaw, and she had kept her promise . . .

* * *

Later, how much later he did not know, something soft cushioned his head. He opened his eyes, stared through swirling, spinning murk. He focussed, saw Arkalion. No—*two* Arkalions standing off at a distance, watching him. He squirmed, knew his head was cushioned in a woman's lap. He sighed, tried to sit up and failed. Soft hands caressed his forehead, his cheeks. A face swam into vision, but mistily. "Sophia," he

murmured. His vision cleared.

It was Stephanie.

"IT'S over," said Arkalion. "We're on our way back to Earth, Kit."

"But the ships—"

- "All destroyed. If my people want to come here in ten thousand years, let them try. I have a hunch you of Earth will be ready for them."

"It took us five thousand to reach Nowhere," Temple mused. "It will take us five thousand to return. We'll come barely in time to warn Earth—"

"Wrong," said Arkalion. "I still have my ship. We're in it now, so you'll reach Earth with almost fifty centuries to spare. Why don't you forget about it, though? If human progress for the next five thousand years matches what has been happening for the last five, the parasites won't stand a chance."

"Earth—five thousand years in the future," Stephanie said dreamily. "I wonder what it will be like . . . Don't be so startled, Kit. I was a pilot study on the Nowhere Journey. If I made it successfully, other women would have been sent. But now there won't be any need."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said the real Alaric Arkalion III. "I suspect a lot of people are go-

ing to feel just like me. Why not go out and colonize space. We can do it. Wonderful to have a frontier again . . . Why, a dozen billionaires will appear for every one like my father. Good for the economy."

"So, if we don't like Earth," said Stephanie, "we can always go out."

"I have a strong suspicion you will like it," said Arkalion's double.

Alaric III grinned. "What about you, bud? I don't want a twin brother hanging around all the time."

Arkalion grinned back at him. "What do you want me to do, young man? I've forsaken my people. This is now my body. Tell you what, I promise to be always on a different continent. Earth isn't so small that I'll get in your hair."

Temple sat up, felt the bandages on his jaw. He smiled at Stephanie, told her he loved her and meant it. It was exactly as if she had returned from the grave and in his first exultation he hadn't even thought of Sophia, who had perished all alone in the depths of space that a world might live . . .

He turned to Arkalion. "Sophia?"

"We found her dead, Kit. But smiling, as if everything was worth it."

"It should have been me."

"Whoever Sophia was," said Stephanie, "she must have been a wonderful woman, because when you got up, when you came to, her name was . . ."

"Forget it," said Temple. "Sophia and I have a very strange relationship and . . ."

"All right, you said forget it. Forget it." Stephanie smiled down at him. "I love you so much there isn't even room for jealousy . . . Ummm . . . Kit . . ."

"Break up that clinch," ordered Arkalion. "We're making one more stop at Nowhere to pick up anyone who wants to return to Earth. Some of 'em' probably won't but those who do are welcome . . ."

"Jason will stay," Temple predicted. "He'll be a leader out among the stars."

"Then he'll have to climb over my back," Alaric III predicted happily, his eyes on the viewport hungrily.

Temple's jaw throbbed. He was tired and sleepy. But satisfied. Sophia had died and for that he was sad, but there would always be a place deep in his heart for the memory of her: delicious, somehow exotic, not a love the way Stephanie was, not as tender, not as sure . . . but a feeling for Sophia that was completely unique. And whenever the strangeness of

the far-future Earth frightened Temple, whenever he felt a situation might get the better of him, whenever doubt clouded judgment, he would remember the tall lithe girl who had walked to her death that a world might have the freedom she barely had tasted. And to-

gether with Stephanie he would be able to do anything.

Unless, he thought dreamily as he drifted off to sleep, his head pillowed again on Stephanie's lap, he'd wind up with a bum jaw the rest of his life.

THE END

INTRODUCING The Author

★ *Milton Lesser* ★

(Continued from Page 2)

up and go. Korea, Europe, North Africa, Iceland, some un-named speck in the Aleutian chain.

I got to thinking: it could be worse. What happens if you take this one step further in some future army—there's a draft, all right, and they send you places, but you don't know where. No one does. They send you and you're supposed to come back, but in twenty years no one ever has. You're scared, confused, angry, bitter maybe because you were about to be married—but you go. Take it from there and I think you have a story. I called it VOYAGE TO ETERNITY.

Those were the birth-pangs of this particular science fiction story. But because science-fiction is such a wide, diversified field, you could

go right on writing—a million stories, if you'd like—and never write the same one twice. I think, though, that science fiction writers essentially are optimists, despite their occasional crack-of-doom stories. They write about the future, which means they think, at the very least, that there *will* be a future—and in these troubled times, that's a pretty clear cut case of optimism.

Along with a lot of other people, I often like to write about the first interstellar voyage. In a sense, VOYAGE TO ETERNITY tells about that. The reason is simple. Once mankind gets out to the stars and begins to spread out across the galaxy, he'll be immortal despite his best—make that *worst*—efforts to destroy himself. You

can destroy a world, maybe a dozen worlds, but spread humanity out thin among the stars, colonies here, there, and all over, and he's immortal. He'll live as long as there's a universe to hold him.

I know interstellar travel is a long way off, but science has a way of leaping ahead in geometric, not arithmetic progression. A hundred years? Perhaps we'll have our first starship then. Let's hope so. For if man can survive the next hundred years—the hardest

hundred, I believe—he'll reach the stars and go on forever.

So — I'll write about the future and keep on hoping, because it happens I was born at the beginning of the hard hundred years. Man will have a future, though, and a magnificent one — *if* he doesn't touch the wrong button and blow himself to pieces within the next century or so. Because I won't be around for that far future, I like to write about it.

—Milton Lesser



"I know they're just weather balloons, sir, but would you come down here for a moment?"

You're not expected to believe this story since it's the kind of thing that science calls impossible. But anyway, she happened. Who? Why—

The Animated Pinup

By

Lewis Parker

TO make it clear how normal everything was when the evening started out, I'll let you in at the time Willy phoned me. I was in my apartment with a lady from down the hall . . .

I had asked her what she liked and she'd purred, "You." I had asked her with soda or gingerale and she'd said, "Straight," so I'd obliged and poured myself a triple too and sank into the sofa beside her.

The phone rang.

"Oh damn," she said.

"Your earlobes—" I began.

"The phone, James."

"Your shoulders —"

"James? Don't you think you'd better answer it?"

So I sighed and handed her the glass and told her not to hold it till I got back or she'd melt the ice. I crossed the room to the telephone.

"City morgue," I said.

"Uh —unh —"

"Hullo Willy," I said, recognizing the stammer.

While he gulped and stuttered a couple more times I threw a kiss to the lady. She failed to throw it back because she was placing a bet with herself that Willy was short for Wilhelmina.



Willy straightened his tongue out. "Jim, I've got to see you."

Now Willy was a nervous little guy from faulty thyroid but neurotic in a bearable way. He sounded even more upset than he usually did. I didn't particularly like him, but he was a topflight illus-

trator and I liked the way he drew women, and besides I'd been trying for a year to tag him for our agency. All the slicker art agencies were after him, that's how good he was. We'd made the highest bid for him but he still had this bug in his noodle for free-



lancing, which showed he had more business sense than the rest of his ilk but which wasn't doing my position at the agency any good. I'd been joed to bag him.

Which was why I hesitated and reconsidered the impulse to brush him off. This was the first time he had definitely asked to see me. Sunday midnight is one hell of a time to suddenly decide to see a dogging agent, but like I said Willy was neurotic. So I just tested the impulse.

"Well, Willy," I said, "I'm pretty busy at the moment looking after the interests of the agency artists. They always come first, you know. Could it wait—"

"Jim, I've got to see you. It's —It's driving me nuts trying to figure out what to do."

"Tax trouble? Or maybe one of your models?"

"No, nothing like that. Listen. Will you come over tonight?"

I let my instincts juggle the stress between pleasure and business. Both were practical, well-balanced personal interests. The thunderous night was young and the lady had nice earlobes and my apartment had that feeling about it. On the other hand the little fair-haired artist was in a jam and if I played fairy godmom bigger and better apartments and earlobes were in the offing from the agency.

So I made the mistake of my life.

I said, "I'll be there in half an hour," and hung up.

"Jim - mee," the lady said. She was pouting, so I pinched her earlobe and patted her shoulders and bemoaned the tyranny of the business world and helped her into her coat. She went back to her own apartment. I tidied up the place, stacked the etchings in their corner, and took a cab outside.

I tossed that part of it in to make it clear that on the face and the underneath of it I could be readily classed as a normal, practical sort of a guy.

I am. I shun unnatural, illogical things, like mysteries, or falsies, or counterfeit bills. Or fourth dimensions. I like an item right on the table where I can eye it and touch it and say, "That's a spade," or, "That's a buck." If there's water on Mars I'll believe it when I drink it, but until then I'll say, "So what's with Mars? It's one hell of a long way off."

You see what I'm driving at? With me, James Gilbert Crisp, things are either down to earth or they're nowhere. I'd never admit messing around with something I couldn't put my hands on. If I touch it, I accept it, and if it's willing I'm able.

"Jim!" said Willy, grabbing my

bat. "Come in, come in!"

I grinned at the little guy assuringly and shook the rain from my coat and tossed it on an easel. He shunted a chair at me and seated himself nervously, rubbing his neck, on the other side of a monster coffee table loaded with paints, bottles and oil-stained cartons. I was familiar with this studio, the working half of Willy's ranch-style chalet. The studio itself was as big as a barn and had more windows than walls; rain pecked at the glass in the north-erly-exposed roof.

Willy was tidy for an artist. Most of the boys on the agency's hook have la Boheme delusions that class them apart from us hucksters; their studios, which we see in spite of ourselves, *look* like barns. But Willy's neuroses, although conventional, were bearable because in a lot of ways he was practical. He kept things where he could put his hands on them. Like the cigarettes he now fished from a box on the coffee table labeled 'caseins'.

I shifted uncomfortably; these new-fangled chairs they twist out of wire will never replace the Morris. Willy drew furiously on the fog he had forgotten to offer me. It was taking him longer than usual to warm up to his subject. I shifted again.

"What's the problem, Willy?"

I asked.

He jumped, then looked at me with his scared-spaniel eyes, butted his smoke and reached for another. Just watching him was giving me the heebies, but I flashed my old fairy godmom smile.

"Jim," he said finally, "I called you because, well, you're a practical guy and can face things in a practical way. I've got to tell *somebody* about it. I'm — it's driving me crazy, Jim."

I stifled a yawn and fixed my smile and found my mind wandering back to the lady's earlobes. Now I'm not against a guy letting down his hair, but I was sure that with Willy it couldn't possibly amount to anymore than another fruitless crush on a model. He had them frequently, but they always fizzled out before the girl got around to compromising him. He was always a foot short of them, but he had money; the usual solution was little more than another illo assignment which required a horsey model of another color. I'd begun to suspect that the cause of neuroses in little artists like Willy was too many here-now gone-tomorrow beautiful babes. Transference, or something like that. It makes them so dizzy they forget which is the real entity—the canvas reproduction or the model. This and other things like a pitiless pituitary loosens the screws,

and then they make from Bohemia. I don't pretend to be a psychologist, but that's the way it adds up.

SO I was half-thinking of getting the lady at the apartment to give Willy a real down-to-earth tumble when he started his spiel. I must have missed a few paragraphs of his monologue, because when I caught up to the subject I was away off base.

" . . . so I've got to give it up, Jim. If I don't there's no telling what it would lead to. You could—help me, with your drag at the agency you represent. I could do account execking, or maybe be a consultant art director-without-portfolio, anything—"

"Whoa down, Willy," I said, startled. "Give up illustrating? Just because of a dame—"

Willy shook his head sadly. "She's got nothing to do with anything *else* I draw. She isn't at all like the models. Oh, I know what a goop I've been about them, but Red has cured me." He paused and looked at me quizzically, shaking his head. "I knew you had a level head, Jim—that's exactly why I've told you this. But even so, your reaction—" He frowned. His hurt-dog eyes narrowed resentfully. "You don't believe me."

I cursed myself inwardly for not

having paid more attention to him, but his voice was the kind that would put a sympathetic Father Confessor to sleep if he concentrated too hard on it. I'd been prepared to let him get it off his skinny chest, pat him on the back and tell him to leave everything to old Jim Fixit. But the quitting business was a loopier. He was too canvas-happy to give it up without a fight.

"Look," I said to cover up the fact that my ears had been closed, "what you told me may seem unusual to you, but to me it's just one of those things that aren't quite what they seem. Now, uh—go over it again in detail and I'll apply myself to it completely from your angle this time. Tell me *exactly* where Red fits in, and where the—uh—trouble started."

Willy slapped his knees and looked even more forlorn, reaching for a smoke while he still had one in his mouth. "Sorry I doubted you, Jim, but you can understand how I feel about it. Look—"

He stood up, butted the fresh fag, and walked across the room to the drawing desk where he did his layouts.

"The best thing to do is simply show you," he said. I sighed and dragged my chair over and sat to one side of him. He pulled out a layout pad, opened his pastels and arranged them deliberately beside

it. I wondered how he could show me his love-troubles this way, unless it was by diagrams.

"Nothing happens," he said, waving a pastel stick under my nose, "until I've used the three basic colors and signed the illo. If there isn't a balance of the three basics it's no good. That's why I arranged the pastels that way."

He naturally assumed I knew what he was talking about. It meant nothing more to me than a freak technique he'd developed. That signature business sounded—neurotic.

NOW this part of my story is important. Until he finished that sketch I was the normal, practical guy I was telling you about. Nothing fizzed on me unless it added up to four and I could feel the two and two of it. A buck was a buck, a girl was a girl—

His grey pastel flew over the paper and as usual I marvelled at how these guys could do it. Like the saying goes, all I can draw is flies and rubber checks, and frequently a blank. I've seen a lot of artists do their stuff, but none of them come up to Willy. You've seen his illos in most of the big slicks—you know, the guy and gal in all angles on the yellow beach under a pink sky, and the story title reads "When Will You Come Back, Dearest?", or the cola

series on the back cover where the girl swigs and the guy gawks at her bathing suit, that sort of stuff. The fat accounts, they all came running for Willy. With him on the payroll the agency could have made a fortune.

I was considering ways to broach this subject so it would tie in with the poor guy's dilemma when he started working the third color into the sketch. Naturally it was a dame; he could draw them with his eyes shut. The third color went into the bathing suit. He smudged chalk on his finger and touched the sketch with quick strokes, moulding the form, and what a form. I leaned forward, and half stood over his chair, marveling at the way he did it. Then, applying a dough rubber to pick out highlights and stray smudges, he leaned back and reached for a pencil. Noticing how tensed he was, I sank back into my chair and lit a cigarette.

"There," he whispered, his hand poised with the pencil at the bottom left-hand corner.

"So now what gives?" I asked. "Is she the—"

"So now I sign it." He looked around at me, spaniel-eyed. I gathered that he was reluctant to sign it. I wanted him to get on with it and explain how it tied in. I must have looked impatient.

"So go ahead," I said. "Sign

it."

He signed it.

The girl got up off the paper and brushed herself off.

I FELT the cigarette smoke burning my eyes, but was too frozen to close them. I must have gone as white as the paper the girl got up off of. Willy touched my shoulder. I looked blearily at his spaniel eyes, which were puzzled.

"Didn't you believe me?" he asked.

I made a noise in my throat, and suddenly wanted desperately to be back in my apartment. Anywhere. But I knew that if I stood up my legs would fold. So I just stared at the girl while my heart flopped like a beached fish.

She smiled at me, then turned to Willy.

"Who's your friend?" she asked in a voice proportionate to her size, which was about a foot.

Willy looked at his hands. "Just a friend." Turning to me he said imploringly, "You *did* believe me, didn't you, Jim?"

I felt like asking him what the hell difference it made whether or not I'd believed him, but I merely swallowed and cleared my throat. I worked my jaws. I took the cigarette from my mouth and looking at it, then at my hand, moving it back and forth to adjust

the focus. I didn't want to do any thinking about it because I knew I'd be scared senseless by the conclusions. So I made my mind a throbbing blank and to the cigarette said the first thing that popped into my head.

"She's pretty."

The girl smiled coyly and seated herself on the blank layout pad.

"Of course I'm pretty," she said. "I'm Willy's ideal. He wouldn't have drawn me if I weren't." She blinked her eyes demurely.

Willy just sat there looking woe-begone, so I went along with it.

"What's your name?"

"Red."

It fitted. The first basic had gone into her hair. I felt myself beginning to twitch. The reaction was setting in again. I found myself wishing that Willy would do something, and not just sit there with his jaw drooping to the floor. I wondered if he could erase her with his dough rubber. I clung to that thought because it seemed funny. I started to laugh. The girl pouted. Willy looked up at me and frowned.

"What's so funny," Red asked.

I took a deep breath and gritted my teeth, but the shakes were coming and this time they wouldn't be deferred. I wheeled from the chair and charged for the door. Willy was up and grabbing at my

arm.

"Don't go, Jim! Please! I've only started to—"

I swung around at him and threw his hand off, panic making my actions loose. Then I saw his spaniel eyes, sad, pleading. I glowered at him and ran my hand through my hair. Looking back at the pint-sized beauty I socked my fist into my hand and stalked back to the drawing desk. I reached out for her. She squeaked and cowered away.

Willy let out a holler that just about scared the pants off both of us, and was tugging at my arm again.

"I just want to *touch* her," I roared. "I won't kill her."

"You touch her like that and you *will* kill her," Willy cried. "Sit down, will you? Listen to me —"

"If I can feel her with my hands," I said, still woozy but cooling down, "I'll believe she's there. Otherwise I go home and sleep it off." I rubbed my forehead. "This kind of stuff isn't for me, kid. You keep your bloody mirages—"

"Please, Jim."

I SCOWLED and dropped into the chair. Willy fumbled for his cigarettes and offered one to me and then in his nervousness proffered one to the redhead, who had

held her palms pressed to her ears while we shouted at each other. Red shook her head, smiling. Willy chuckled his embarrassment and sat down in the other chair. We were both facing the desk but I couldn't bring myself to look at the girl.

Suddenly she leapt from the desk and was standing in my lap. While I groaned and held my breath she stretched her arm out.

"You may touch me, if it will make you feel better."

I glanced at Willy, who nodded, and touched the point of my finger to her palm. She was there all right. I drew my hand away quickly, and she laughed. It sounded precisely like the voice of a full-length girl coming from another room. I studied her with my chin resting on my fist, and saw that she was indeed a beautiful creature. Full-size, she'd be a knockout; I'd be falling, as the saying goes, all over her. But a foot high!

Then I remembered that Willy had sketched her. She was a drawing. Tri-dimensional, but nonetheless a figment of Willy's imagination. Yet she was solid. I was getting confused again, trying to tie it, so to fend off a return of the shakes I forced another blank into my mind. It was easier, this time. The whole thing was so ridiculous it was intriguing.

"Who is she, Willy?" I asked. It was easier to talk to him.

"Like I told you. Red. My dream girl."

I looked at him. "Yeah. M-hmm." I looked down at Red. She was sitting on my kneecap, combing her hair. "So just what seems to be the problem?"

His eyes were pathetic. "Again, like I told you. I'm too big for her."

"Yeah," I said. "Uh-huh." It had to be as simple as that. Something practical-like; for Willy, like I said, was basically a practical guy. Or practically a basic guy. I frowned at him, for the answer was also a simple one.

"Then why don't you draw her full size?" I asked.

Willy looked miserable. "I do."

I said, "Mmm?"

"I *do* draw her full-size. That's Red's full size. Twelve inches."

I nodded, following his lips.

"Once," he continued, "I drew her a little larger."

From her perch on my kneecap Red said, coolly, "Don't you dare try *that* again."

"No, dear," Willy said, sadly.

I rubbed my head. To Willy I said, "You can't—project her?"

Willy started to answer, but Red interrupted. She looked piqued.

"Of course he can't project me. That would be a distortion of myself. It wouldn't," she yawned,

ruffling her red locks, "be me."

I rubbed my head again. I couldn't think of anything to say.

Willy shifted. "I can draw her smaller," he said. "But that would make it even worse, of course."

I nodded. "Of course." Because it seemed practical to say it, I said it: "But wouldn't that be a distortion too?"

"Of course not," Red said, and I had the fleeting impression of being faced by a school teacher in the minute end of a telescope. "Minimized elements are true elements, merely condensed. Maximized elements are bloated, therefore distorted." She sniffed. "Any figment knows that."

I tossed it around in my floundering mind, but it still came out the way it sounded. There was another silence. I could see that the two of them were losing faith in my godmaternal fairyhood. So just to keep the conversation jogging, I tried another tack. To Willy I said:

"If Red's a figment of your imagination, why didn't you imagine her a more practical size in the first place?"

WILLY chewed on it for a couple minutes. Red turned away in disgust to leap from my kneecap to Willy's. She seated herself primly and began fuss-

ing with her infinitesimal nails. Willy said, "After all, she does have a mind of her own, Jim. She wanted to be imagined the size she is, so—" He looked at me and shrugged.

"Why," demanded the little woman, "should I go up to him? Why can't he come down to me?"

I was getting riled. "You love him, don't you?"

She frowned. "He loves me, doesn't he?"

This had a familiar feminine ring to it which balked pursuit of *that* subject. I wouldn't have believed that Willy possessed such a dogmatic objective imagination. If I wanted to conjure up a babe I'd make sure beforehand that she came out the way I whimmed her. Red had a mind of her own, which was the negative, or feminine, part of Willy's mind.

All these thoughts popped up in my head because I had to keep this in a practical light to insure against a return of the shakes. If I started considering the *impractical* side of it I'd recognize it in its true light, which was unmitigated madness.

Willy and Red remained silent, inferring that I was to carry the ball.

"What I'm dim about, Willy, is how this ties in with your professional livelihood. Why do you have to give up art?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

I shook my head meekly. Willy sighed and reached for a pastel stick. He sketched quickly on the layout pad, first in greys, then filling in with the three basics. It was a martini glass, and the first basic was the cherry in it. Then he addressed his signature under the sketch.

He picked up the martini glass and drained it.

Looking apologetically at my ogle he picked up the pastels again and said, "Sorry. Care for one?"

I said sure. You have to go all the way or nowhere with these things. Besides, a drink might stop the rumbling in my stomach. "Make it a rye," I said. "Triple."

He sketched it and signed it and handed it to me, and I said, "I see what you mean. Everything you sketch, huh?" The rye was good.

Willy sighed morosely. "Anything in color. And I made my name in color work. I can't do a black and white for beans."

"Why don't you—"

"Leave off my signature?" He smiled wanly. "You know better than that, Jim."

I did. He had a big name, and that, as is the way of commerce, is what the buyers paid for. Things looked hopeless for Willy. We sat. Red got up and stretched, then ad-

justed her halter, into which Willy had put too much imagination. She jumped from Willy's knee to the drawing desk, and stretched out on the pad. Willy looked at her hungrily, and she smiled warmly back at him. I was beginning to get that "third party" feeling—and then it hit me.

I leaned forward excitedly. "We will make a million!" I roared.

They stared at me. Coolly. I went to the back of the chair again. After a few minutes their contemptuous stares got my neck.

"Okay, okay," I muttered. "We *won't* make a million."

They waited expectantly for a compatible solution. To show that I was still working on it I started talking again.

"Let's sum up. You and Red want to get together. Which is only right, because you literally belong to each other. Check. But you can't, because Red's too small and you're too tall."

"Check," they said simultaneously. I stumbled on.

"Okay," I addressed Red. "Let's take you first. You are your—uh—natural size. You are satisfied with it. You cannot be projected up because it would distort you."

Red nodded. "I would consider it indecent."

"And anyway, you are satisfied with your element. You prefer it to Willy's."

"Immensely more. So would Willy."

"And what is your element?" I asked.

"Willy's mind."

I IGNORED that because it led to the shakes department. I turned to Willy. I was getting excited.

"Now, Willy. You are your natural size. You are unsatisfied with it, because—uh—your peculiar talent is lousing up your profession. What is more, Red's size and element is the preference manifested in your mind. Her element is doubly preferred, then, as against your own, by both of you, uh—"

"Making the preference unanimous," Willy suggested.

"Right," I said, pushing the thing out of my mind now that I'd stumbled through it. I spread my arms and gave what I hoped was a confident smile.

"There's your answer," I said. I got blank looks.

"It's obvious!" I said to Willy. "You go to Red's element!"

Willy's meager features were perplexed, but Red caught the idea. She jumped excitedly back on her beau's lap. "Don't you see what he means, Willy? Draw yourself to my size!"

That is a verbatim report of what led up to Willy propping a

full-length mirror in an easel and making a twelve-and-a-half inch full-length portrait of himself, with me drinking triple ryes while Red directed which of Willy's features should manifest the most prominence. It was a very good likeness of himself as he might have looked had he been the physical Adonis his mind pictured him as, which was only right, considering the element he was journeying to. Red insisted he wear a bathing suit that more or less matched her own.

When he was finished, he stepped back, naturally, to admire it.

"That's terrific!" I said, clapping him on the back.

"Watch on whom you're spilling the rye," Red flared. I apologized, and in my philanthropic state stooped to kiss her. She backed away.

"A kiss for the bride," I said, pouting. "That's all."

She laughed. "You'd swallow me." But she approached and stood up on tip-toe and bussed my nose.

"Break it up," Willy said, a new authority in his voice. "I've got to put my signature to the sketch." He tapped impatiently. "Red. Lie down beside the sketch."

Red flushed and placed her hands on her hips. "Now look here, Willy. Don't you go getting too big for your boots!"

I guffawed. "It's the other way 'round! He'll be too *small* for his boots."

This diverted the quarrel enough for Willy to give me final instructions, which he did from a prone position on the floor. "Is Red lying down beside the sketch, Jim?"

"Yup," I said, squinting at the once-again two-dimensioned Red-head.

"Now I'll transfer my mind to the sketch. I'll move an arm when I'm there."

He closed his eyes, and a straining expression twisted his features.

"Am I there yet?"

"Nope," I said, bringing my eyes to focus three inches from the sketch.

A few grunting moments passed.

"Am I there yet?"

"Nope," I said, stifling a yawn.

"Something's wrong," he said.

I turned to look down at him. His straining expression was now from thought. I turned back to the layout pad, and jumped.

"What's taking him so long?" Red demanded, sitting up.

"He can't transfer," I said.

She gave me the schoolmarm expression, hands on hips. "Haven't you killed him yet?"

"Mmm?" I asked.

"You've got to *kill* him, silly!"

I shook my head. "Unh-unh. Not me."

She started to cry. "I thought you *wanted* us to get together!"

FEELING like a louse, I turned to look down at Willy. "She says I've got to kill you."

"How?"

Red had come to the edge of the drawing desk. "What does it matter, how?" she said sternly. "You know perfectly well that the only way to get rid of the body you're in is to die." She looked back at me. "What are you waiting for?"

I rubbed my head. "Somehow it doesn't seem—"

She sat back and wailed. Willy jumped from the floor and cupped her tenderly in his hands. "Don't cry, sweet. After all, it is asking a lot of Jim."

"He gave us the solution," she cried, "and now he's backing out of his part in it!"

"Well," said Willy, "he wasn't expected to know he'd have to kill me—"

"How *else* can you leave the body you're in?" she sobbed. "What did he expect you'd do? Occupy two bodies at the same time?"

Willy looked at me. I shrugged. "Have to confess I hadn't thought of it," I muttered, only half aware that they had me over a barrel. I was half tempted to ask Willy to fill my rye glass with pastels again,

but it seemed an imposition at the moment.

"Oh, what the hell," I said committingly. "I'm not the kind of guy to let a friend down over a technicality!"

Red leapt to my lap and clambered up my shirtfront. "I *knew* you wouldn't let us down!" she said happily, and bussed my chin. Before I could be modest about it she had bounded to the desk-top and was stretching herself out beside Willy's drawing of himself. Willy and I stared from her to each other.

"Well," Willy said. "Let's get to it."

I won't elaborate on the details on my act of friendship. I killed Willy in as gentle a manner as possible, and when I turned back to the layout pad they were sitting there embracing. Willy-the-Figment stood up proudly and extended his hand, the one Red wasn't clinging to.

"Thanks, Jim," he said, when I had shaken it warmly with my finger-tip. "I knew when I phoned you tonight that you were just the one who would come up with an unselfish, practical solution to my dilemma. I'd like to say—"

"Oh, come on, come on, Willy," Red said impatiently, pulling him back to the pad. "Jim knows how much we appreciate his help. Come *on*!"

"Oh, very well," said Willy, winking at me. I winked back. "Lucky sti—" I began, but then remembered Willy's corpse. That brought a nagging thought to my mind, but Willy and Red were lying side-by side, half submerged in their second dimension, and Red was beckoning impatiently, pointing to the dough rubber beside her.

"Hurry up," she said. "Rub us out."

I rubbed them out.

Willy's body vanished from the floor as I dropped the eraser. And just as suddenly I was sober. Cold, shaking sober.

Where was Willy? I looked around the room. Nobody but me. Me and my delirium tremens.

I got out of that apartment fast and headed for a long line of drinks. I had a big case of murder to wash away. Or did I? ...

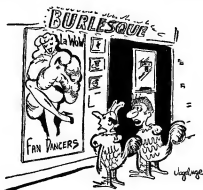
... So you see, that's how it is. Willy's gone, and nobody knows where. Nobody but me. And I don't know either. I keep thinking of what Red said about her "fourth dimension" world. I think about it a lot.

I've given up my job at the agency. My apartment too. I got a new one. Willy's. It's just as it was that night. Right down to the last pastel and brush. It's going to stay that way too. Everything just as it was. Every gadget that Willy used in his work.

I've got a use for everything in that apartment. I've got to *know* what happened. And there's only one real way to find out.

I spend my days thinking about my ideal woman. Each day she gets more vivid in my mind.

My evenings are spent at Art School. I'm learning fast ...



"Brother—look at those gorgeous feathers!"





NATIVE SON

By

J. D. Hamm

Tommy hated Earth, knowing his mother might go home to Mars without him. Worse, would a robot secretly take her place? . . .

TOMMY Benton, on his first visit to Earth, found the long-anticipated wonders of twenty-first century New York thrilling the first week, boring and unhappy the second week, and at

the end of the third he was definitely ready to go home.

The never-ending racket of traffic was torture to his abnormally acute ears. Increased atmospheric pressure did funny things to his

chest and stomach. And quick and sure-footed on Mars, he struggled constantly against the heavy gravity that made all his movements clumsy and uncoordinated.

The endless canyons of towering buildings, with their connecting skywalks, oppressed and smothered him. Remembering the endless vistas of *rabbara* fields beside a canal that was like an inland sea, homesickness flooded over him.

He hated the people who stared at him with either open or hidden amusement. His Aunt Bee, for instance, who looked him up and down with frank disapproval and said loudly, "For Heavens sake, Helen! Take him to a *good* tailor and get those bones covered up!"

Was it his fault he was six inches taller than Terran boys his age, and had long, thin arms and legs? Or that his chest was abnormally developed to compensate for an oxygen-thin atmosphere? I'd like to see *her*, he thought fiercely, out on the Flatlands; she'd be gasping like a canal-fish out of water.

Even his parents, happily riding the social merry-go-round of Terra, after eleven years in the Martian flatlands, didn't seem to understand how he felt.

"Don't you *like* Earth, Tommy?" queried his mother anxiously.

"Oh . . . it's all right, I guess."

"... 'A nice place to visit' ..." said his father sardonically.

"... 'but I wouldn't live here if they gave me the place!' ..." said his mother, and they both burst out laughing for no reason that Tommy could see. Of course, they did that lots of times at home and Tommy laughed with them just for the warm, secure feeling of belonging. This time he didn't feel like laughing.

"When *are* we going home?" he repeated stubbornly.

His father pulled Tommy over in the crook of his arm and said gently, "Well, not right away, son. As a matter of fact, how would you like to stay here and go to school?"

Tommy pulled away and looked at him incredulously.

"I've *been* to school!"

"Well, yes," admitted his father. "But only to the colony schools. You don't want to grow up and be an ignorant Martian sandfoot all your life, do you?"

"Yes, I do! I *want* to be a Martian sandfoot. And I want to go home where people don't *look* at me and say, 'So this is your little Martian!'"

Benton, Sr., put his arm around Tommy's stiffly resistant shoulders. "Look here, old man," he said persuasively. "I thought you wanted to be a space engineer. You can't do that without an edu-

cation you know. And your Aunt Bee will take good care of you."

Tommy faced him stubbornly. "I don't want to be any old spaceman. I want to be a sandfoot like old Pete. And I want to go home."

Helen bit back a smile at the two earnest, stubborn faces so ridiculously alike, and hastened to avert the gathering storm.

"Now look, fellows. Tommy's career doesn't have to be decided in the next five minutes . . . after all, he's only ten. He can make up his mind later on if he wants to be an engineer or a *rabbara* farmer. Right now, he's going to stay here and go to school . . . and I'm staying with him."

Resolutely avoiding both crestfallen faces, Helen, having shepherded Tommy to bed, returned to the living room acutely conscious of Big Tom's bleak, hurt gaze at her back.

"Helen, you're going to make a sissy out of the boy," he said at last. "There isn't any reason why he can't stay here at home with Bee."

Helen turned to face him.

"Earth *isn't* home to Tommy. And your sister Bee told him he ought to be out playing football with the boys instead of hanging around the house."

"But she knows the doctor said he'd have to take it easy for a year

till he was accustomed to the change in gravity and air-pressure," he answered incredulously.

"Exactly. She also asked me," Helen went on grimly, "if I thought he'd be less of a freak as he got older."

Tom Benton swore. "Bee always did have less sense than the average hen," he gritted. "My son a freak! Hell's-bells!"

Tommy, arriving at the hall door in time to hear the tail-end of the sentence, crept back to bed feeling numb and dazed. So even his father thought he was a freak.

THE last few days before parting was one of strain for all of them. If Tommy was unnaturally subdued, no one noticed it; his parents were not feeling any great impulse toward gaiety either.

They all went dutifully sight-seeing as before; they saw the Zoo, and went shopping on the Skywalks, and on the last day wound up at the great showrooms of "Androids, Inc."

Tommy had hated them on sight; they were at once too human and too inhuman for comfort. The hotel was full of them, and most private homes had at least one. Now they saw the great incubating vats, and the processing and finally the showroom where one of the finished products was on display as a maid, sweeping

and dusting.

"There's one that's a dead-ringer for you, Helen. If you were a little better looking, that is." Tommy's dad pretended to compare them judicially. Helen laughed, but Tommy looked at him with a resentfulness. Comparing his mother to an Android . . .

"They say for a little extra you can get an exact resemblance. Maybe I'd better have one fixed up like you to take back with me," Big Tom added teasingly. Then as Helen's face clouded over, "Oh, hon, you know I was only kidding. Let's get out of here; this place gives me the collywobbles. Besides, I've got to pick up my watch."

But his mother's face was still unhappy and Tommy glowered sullenly at his father's back all the way to the watch-shop.

It was a small shop, with an inconspicuous sign down in one corner of the window that said only, "KRUMBEIN-watches", and was probably the most famous shop of its kind in the world. Every spaceman landing on Terra left his watch to be checked by the dusty, little old man who was the genius of the place. Tommy ranged wide-eyed about the clock and chronometer crammed interior. He stopped fascinated before the last case. In it was a watch . . . but, *what* a watch! Besides the regulation Terran dial, it had a

second smaller dial that registered the corresponding time on Mars. Tommy's whole heart went out to it in an ecstasy of longing. He thought wistfully that if you could know what time it was there, you could imagine what everyone was doing and it wouldn't seem so far away. Haltingly, he tried to explain.

"Look, Mom," he said breathlessly. "It's almost five o'clock at home. Douwie will be coming up to the barn to be fed. Gosh, do you suppose old Pete will remember about her?"

His mother smiled at him reassuringly. "Of course he will, silly. Don't forget he was the one who caught and tamed her for you."

Tommy gulped as he thought of Douwie. Scarcely as tall as himself; the big, rounded, mouselike ears, and the flat, cloven pads that could carry her so swiftly over the sandy Martian flatlands. One of the last dwindling herds of native Martian douwies, burden-carriers of a vanished race, she had been Tommy's particular pride and joy for the last three years.

Behind him, Tommy heard his mother murmur under her breath, "Tom . . . the watch; *could* we?"

And his Dad regretfully, "It's a pretty expensive toy for a youngster, Helen. And even a rabbara raiser's bank account has

limits."

"Of course, dear; it was silly of me." Helen smiled a little ruefully. "And if Mr. Krumbein has your watch ready, we *must* go. Bee and some of her friends are coming over, and it's only a few hours 'till you . . . leave."

Big Tom squeezed her elbow gently, understandingly, as she blinked back quick tears. Trailing after them, Tommy saw the little by-play and his heart ached. The guilt-complex building up in him grew and deepened.

He knew he had only to say, "Look, I don't mind staying. Aunt Bee and I will get along swell," and everything would be all right again. Then the terror of this new and complex world — as it would be without a familiar face — swept over him and kept him silent.

His overwrought feelings expressed themselves in a nervously rebelling stomach, culminating in a disgraceful moment over the nearest gutter. The rest of the afternoon he spent in bed recuperating.

In the living room Aunt Bee spoke her mind in her usual, high-pitched voice.

"It's disgraceful, Helen. A boy his age . . . None of the *Bentons* ever had nerves."

His mother's reply was inaudible, but on the heels of his father's deeper tones, Aunt Bee's

voice rose in rasping indignation.

"*Well!* I never! And from my own brother, too. From now on don't come to me for 'help with your spoiled brat. Good-bye!"

The door slammed indignantly, his mother chuckled, and there was a spontaneous burst of laughter. Tommy relaxed and lay back happily. Anyway, that was the last of Aunt Bee!

THE next hour or two passed in a flurry of ringing phones, people coming and going, and last minute words and reminders. Then suddenly it was time to leave. Dad burst in for a last quick hug and a promise to send him pictures of Douwie and her foal, due next month; Mother dropped a hasty kiss on his hair and promised to hurry back from the Spaceport. Then Tommy was alone, with a large, painful lump where his heart ought to be.

The only activity was the almost noiseless buzzing as the hotel android ran the cleaner over the living room. Presently even that ceased, and Tommy lay relaxed and inert, sleepily watching the curtains blow in and out at the open window. Thirty stories above the street the noises were pleasantly muffled and remote, and his senses drifted aimlessly to and fro on the tides of half-sleep.

Drowsily his mind wandered

from the hotel's android servants . . . to the strictly utilitarian mechanical monstrosity at home, known affectionately as "Old John" . . . to the android show-room where they had seen the one that Dad said looked like Mother . . .

He jolted suddenly, sickeningly awake. Suppose, his mind whispered treacherously, suppose that Dad *had* ordered one to take Mom's place . . . not on Mars, but *here* while she returned to Mars with him. Suppose that instead of Mom he discovered one of those *Things* . . . or even worse, suppose he went on from day to day not even knowing . . .

It was a bad five minutes; he was wet with perspiration when he lay back on his pillows, a shaky smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. He had a secret defense against the Terror. He giggled a little at the thought of what Aunt Bee would say if she knew.

And what had brought him back from the edge of hysteria was the triumphant knowledge that with the abnormally acute hearing bred in the thin atmosphere of Mars, no robot ever created could hide from him the infinitesimal ticking

of the electronic relays that gave it life. Secure at last, his overstrung nerves relaxed and he slid gratefully over the edge of sleep.

He woke abruptly, groping after some vaguely remembered sound. A soft clicking of heels down the hall . . . Of course, his mother back from the Spaceport! Now she would be stopping at his door to see if he were asleep. He lay silently; through his eyelashes he could see her outlined in the soft light from the hall. She was coming in to see if he was tucked in. In a moment he would jump up and startle her with a hug, as she leaned over him. In a moment . . .

Screaming desperately, he was out of bed, backing heedlessly across the room. He was still screaming as the low sill of the open window caught him behind the knees and toppled him thirty stories to the street.

Alone in the silent room, Helen Benton stood dazed, staring blindly at the empty window.

Tommy's parting gift from his father slid from her hand and lay on the carpet, still ticking gently.

It was 9:23 on Mars.

The End

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★ *Earth's Natural Defense* ★

THE exciting forthcoming film H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds", brings out a theme whose importance often isn't appreciated—the defense of the Earth against extra-terrestrial invaders. Wells' Martians invade the Earth and almost conquer it, a familiar, classic tale, but the invaders succumb to Earth's irresistible defenses—bacteria!

The idea of course isn't new—wasn't new, even when Wells wrote his classic—but it is actually an extremely important idea. Any possible extra-terrestrials who might invade Earth, regardless of the level of their technology, would

likely find in our incredibly prolific — and deadly — bacteria, more than their match.

This idea of native bacteria being hostile to invaders is two-edged of course. Scientists theorize that when men reach the planets it is possible—even likely—that if they encounter no other life-form, they are almost certain to meet with Nature's lowest type, the bacterium. And so subtle and damaging can these be, that they may constitute a perfect barrier to colonization. It is comforting to think that similarly the Earth is protected!

* * *



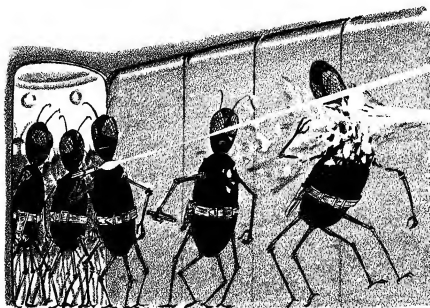
"I know he just got back from his vacation—but where did he go?"

THE COSMIC POACHERS

By

Philip K. Dick

Adharan space ships had no authority to prospect earth-controlled stellar systems. But what bothered the Galactic Patrol even more was the fact they were finding valuable treasure on worlds Earthmen had found barren!



“WHAT kind of ship is it?” Captain Shure demanded, staring fixedly at the viewscreen, his hands gripping the fine adjustment.

Navigator Nelson peered over his shoulder. “Wait a minute.” He swung the control camera over and snapped a photograph from the screen. The photograph disappeared down the message tube to the chart room. “Keep calm. We’ll get a determination from Barnes.”

“What are they doing here? What are they after? They must know the Sirius system is closed.”

“Notice the balloon sides.” Nelson traced the screen with his finger. “It’s a freighter. Look at the bulge. It’s a cargo carrier.”

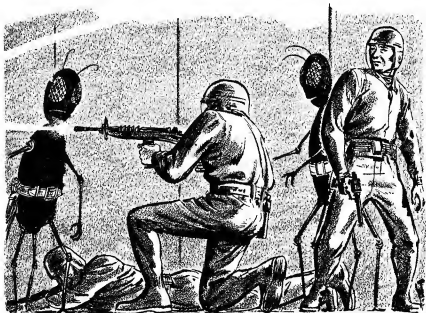
“And while you’re looking, notice *that*.” Shure whirled the enlarger. The image of the ship bloated, expanding until it filled the screen. “See that row of projections?”

“So?”

“Heavy guns. Countersunk. For deep-space firing. It’s a freighter, but it’s also armed.”

“Pirates, maybe.”

“Maybe.” Shure toyed with the communications mike. “I’m tempt-



ed to put a call back to Terra."

"Why?"

"This may be a scout."

Nelson's eyes flickered. "You think they're in the process of sounding us out? But if there are more, why don't our screens pick them up?"

"The rest may be out of range."

"More than two light years? I have the screens up to maximum. And they're the best screens available."

The determination popped up the tube from the chart room, skidding out on the table. Shure broke it open and scanned it rapidly. He passed it to Nelson. "Here."

The ship was Adharan design. First-class, from a recent freighter group. Barnes had noted in his own hand: "But not supposed to be armed. Must have added the cannon. Not standard equipment on Adharan freighters."

"Then it's not bait," Shure murmured. "We can rule that out. What's the story on Adhara? Why would an Adharan ship be in the Sirius system? Terra has closed this whole region off for years. They must know they can't trade here."

"No one knows much about Adharans. They participated in the All-galaxy Trade Conference, but that's all."

"What race are they?"

"Arachnid type. Typical of this area. Based on the Great Murzim Stem. They're a variant of the Murzim original. They keep mostly to themselves. Complex social structure, very rigid patterns. Organic-state grouping."

"You mean they're insects."

"I suppose. In the same sense we're lemurs."

Shure turned his attention back to the viewscreen. He reduced magnification, watching intently. The screen followed the Adharan ship automatically, maintaining a direct alignment with it.

THE Adharan ship was heavy and black, awkward in comparison to the sleek Terran cruiser. It bulged like a well-fed worm, its somber sides swollen almost to a full sphere. An occasional guide light blinked on and off as the ship approached the outermost planet of the Sirius system. It moved slowly, cautiously, feeling its way along. It entered the orbit of the tenth planet and began maneuvering for descent. Brake jets burst on, flashing red. The bloated worm drifted down, lowering itself toward the surface of the planet.

"They're landing," Nelson murmured.

"That's fine. They'll be stationary. Good target for us."

On the surface of the tenth planet the Adharan freighter lay rest-

ing, its jets dying into silence. A cloud of exhaust particles rose from it. The freighter had landed between two mountain ranges, on a barren waste of gray sand. The surface of the tenth planet was utterly barren. No life, atmosphere or water existed. The planet was mostly rock, cold gray rock, with vast shadows and pits, a corroded sickly surface, hostile and bleak.

Abruptly the Adharan ship came to life. Hatches popped open. Tiny black dots rushed from the ship. The dots increased in number, a flood of specks pouring out of the freighter, scurrying across the sand. Some of them reached the mountains and disappeared among the craters and peaks. Others gained the far side, where they were lost in the long shadows.

"I'll be damned," Shure muttered. "It doesn't make sense. What are they after? We've gone over these planets with a fine tooth comb. There's nothing anyone would want, down there."

"They may have different wants, Or different methods."

Shure stiffened. "Look. Their cars are coming back to the ship."

The black dots had reappeared, emerging from the shadows and craters. They hurried back toward the mother worm, racing across the sand. The hatches opened. One by one the cars

popped into the ship and disappeared. A few belated cars made their way to the ship and entered. The hatches clamped shut.

"What in hell could they have found?" Shure said.

Communications Officer Barnes entered the control room, craning his neck. "Still down there? Let me have a look. I've never seen an Adharan ship."

On the surface of the planet the Adharan ship stirred. Suddenly it shuddered, quivering from stem to stern. It rose from the surface, gaining altitude rapidly. It headed for the ninth planet. For a time it circled the ninth planet, observing the pitted, eroded surface below. Empty basins of dried-up oceans stretched out like immense pie pans.

The Adharan ship selected one of the basins and settled down to a landing, blowing clouds of exhaust up into the sky.

"The same damn thing again," Shure murmured.

Hatches opened. Black specks leaped out onto the surface and rushed off in all directions.

Shure's jaw jutted out angrily. "We have to find out what they're after. Look at them go! They know exactly what they're doing." He grabbed up the communication mike. Then he dropped it. "We can handle this alone. We won't need Terra."

"It's armed, don't forget."

"We'll catch it as it lands. They're stopping at each planet in order. We'll go all the way in to the fourth planet." Shure moved rapidly, bringing the command chart into position. "When they land on the fourth planet we'll be there waiting for them."

"They may put up a fight."

"Maybe. But we have to find out what they're loading. They're finding something—and whatever it is, it belongs to us."

THE Fourth Planet of the Sirius System had an atmosphere, and some water. Shure landed his cruiser in the ruins of an ancient city, long deserted.

The Adharan freighter had not appeared. Shure scanned the sky and then raised the main hatch. He and Barnes and Nelson stepped outside cautiously, armed with heavy-duty Slem rifles. Behind them the hatch slammed back in place and the cruiser took off, roaring up into the sky.

They watched it go, standing together with their rifles ready. The air was cold and thin. They could feel it blowing around their pressure suits.

Barnes turned up the temperature of his suit. "Too cold for me."

"Makes you realize we're still Terrans, even though we're light

years from home," Nelson said.

"Here's the outline," Shure said. "We can't blast them. That's out. We're after their cargo. If we blast them we'll blast the cargo along with them."

"What'll we use?"

"We'll shoot a vapor cloud around them."

"A vapor cloud? But—"

"Captain," Nelson said, "We can't use a vapor cloud. We won't be able to get near them until the vapor has become inert."

"There's a wind. The vapor will dissipate very quickly. Anyhow, it's all we can do. We'll have to take the chance. As soon as the Adharan is sighted, we must be ready to open fire."

"What if the cloud misses?"

"Then we're in for a fight." Shure studied the sky intently. "I think it's coming. Let's go."

They hurried to a hill of piled up rocks, remains of columns and towers heaped in great mounds, mixed with debris and rubble.

"This will do." Shure crouched down, his Slem rifle held tightly. "Here they come."

The Adharan ship had appeared above them. It was preparing to land. Down it settled, its jets roaring, exhaust particles rising. With a crash it struck the ground, bouncing a little and finally coming to rest.

Shure gripped his phone. "Okay."

Above them in the sky the cruiser appeared, sweeping down over the Adharan. From the cruiser a blue-white cloud shot, drilled out by pressure jets directly at the black Adharan ship. The cloud reached the parked freighter. It billowed around it, fusing into it.

The surface of the Adharan hull glowed briefly. It began to fall in, eaten away. Corroded. The Terran cruiser swept past, completing its run. It disappeared into the sky.

From the Adharan ship figures were emerging, jumping out onto the ground. The figures sprang in all directions, long-legged, leaping wildly around. Most of the figures hopped excitedly up onto their ship, dragging hoses and equipment, working frantically, disappearing into the vapor cloud.

"They're spraying."

More Adharans appeared, leaping frantically up and down, onto their ship, onto the ground, some this way, others in no particular direction at all.

"Like when you step on an ant hill," Barnes murmured.

The hull of the Adharan ship was covered with clinging Adharans, spraying desperately, trying to halt the corrosive action of the vapor. Above them the Terran cruiser reappeared, entering a second run. It grew, swelling from a dot into a tear-shaped needle,

flashing in the sunlight from Sirius. The freighter's bank of guns jutted up desperately, trying to align themselves with the swiftly moving cruiser.

"Bomb close by," Shure ordered into his phone. "But no direct hits. I want to save the cargo."

The cruiser's bomb racks opened. Two bombs fell, singing down in an expert arc. They straddled the inert freighter, bursting on both sides. Towering clouds of rock and debris rose up, billowing over the freighter. The black worm shuddered, Adharans sliding off the hull onto the ground. The bank of guns fired a few futile blasts as the cruiser swept past and disappeared.

"They haven't got a chance," Nelson murmured. "They can't leave the ground until they've got their hull sprayed."

Most of the Adharans were beginning to flee from their ship, scattering onto the ground.

"It's almost over," Shure said. He got to his feet and stepped out from the ruins. "Let's go."

A white flare burst up from the Adharan, showering sparks in the sky. The Adharans milled aimlessly around, confused by the attack. The cloud of vapor had virtually dissipated. The flare was the conventional signal of capitulation. The cruiser was circling again, above the freighter, waiting for

orders from Shure.

"Look at them," Barnes said. "Insects, big as people."

"Come on!" Shure said impatiently. "Let's go. I'm anxious to see what's inside."

THE Adharan commander met them outside its ship. It moved toward them, apparently dazed from the attack.

Nelson and Shure and Barnes gazed at it in revulsion. "Lord," Barnes muttered. "So that's what they're like."

The Adharan stood almost five feet tall, enclosed in a black chitin shell. It stood on four slender legs, two more weaving uncertainly half-way up its body. It wore a loose belt, holding its gun and equipment. Its eyes were complex, multi-lensed. Its mouth was a narrow slit at the base of its elongated skull. It had no ears.

Behind the Adharan commander a group of crew members stood uncertainly, some of them with weapon tubes partly raised. The Adharan commander made a series of sharp clicks with its mouth, waving its antennae. The other Adharans lowered their tubes.

"How is communication with this race possible?" Barnes asked Nelson.

Shure moved forward. "It doesn't matter. We have nothing to say to them. They know they

are illegally here. It's the cargo we're interested in."

He pushed past the Adharan commander. The group of Adharans made way for him. He entered the ship, Nelson and Barnes following after him.

The interior of the Adharan ship reeked and dripped with slime. The passages were narrow and dark, like long tunnels. The floor was slippery underfoot. A few crew members scuttled around in the darkness, their claws and antennae waving nervously. Shure flashed his light down one of the corridors.

"This way. It looks like the main passage."

The Adharan commander followed close behind them. Shure ignored him. Outside, the cruiser had landed nearby. Nelson could see Terran soldiers standing around on the surface.

Ahead of them a metal door closed off the corridor. Shure indicated the door, making an opening motion.

"Open it."

The Adharan commander retreated, making no move to open the door. A few more Adharans scuttled up, all of them with weapon tubes.

"They may fight yet," Nelson said calmly.

Shur raised his Slem rifle at the door. "I'll have to blast it."

The Adharans clicked excitedly. None of them approached the door.

"All right," Shure said grimly. He fired. The door dissolved, smoking into ruins. It sank down, leaving an opening wide enough to pass through. The Adharans rushed around wildly, clicking to each other. More of them left the hull and poured into the ship, flocking around the three Terrans.

"Come on," Shure said, stepping through the gaping hole. Nelson and Barnes followed him, Slem rifles ready.

The passage led down. The air was heavy and thick, and as they walked down the passage, Adharans pressed behind them.

"Get back," Shure spun, his rifle up. The Adharans halted. "Stay back. Come on. Let's go."

The Terrans turned a corner. They were in the hold. Shure advanced cautiously, moving with care. Several Adharan guards stood with drawn weapon tubes.

"Get out of the way," Shure waved his Slem rifle. Reluctantly, the guards moved aside. "Come on!"

The guards separated. Shure advanced.

And stopped, amazed.

BEFORE them was the cargo of the ship. The hold was half-filled with carefully stacked orbs of milky fire, giant jewels like im-

mense pearls. Thousands of them. As far back as they could see. Disappearing back into the recesses of the ship, endless stacks of them. All glowing with a soft radiance, an inner illumination that lit up the vast hold of the ship.

"Incredible!" Shure muttered.

"No wonder they were willing to slip in here without permission." Barnes took a deep breath, his eyes wide. "I think I'd do the same. Look at them!"

"Big, aren't they?" Nelson said.

They glanced at each other.

"I've never seen anything like it," Shure said, dazed. The Adharan guards were watching them warily, their weapon tubes ready. Shure advanced toward the first row of jewels, stacked neatly with mathematical precision. "It doesn't seem possible. Jewels piled up like—like a warehouse full of door-knobs."

"They may have belonged to the Adharans at one time," Nelson said thoughtfully. "Maybe they were stolen by the city-builders of the Sirius system. Now they're getting them back."

"Interesting," Barnes said. "Might explain why the Adharans found them so easily. Perhaps charts or maps existed."

Shure grunted. "In any case they're *ours*, now. Everything in the Sirius system belongs to Terra. It's all been signed, sealed and

agreed on."

"But if these were originally stolen from the Adharans—"

"They shouldn't have agreed to the closed-system treaties. They have their own systems. This belongs to Terra." Shure reached up toward one of the jewels. "I wonder how it feels."

"Careful, Captain. It may be radioactive."

Shure touched one of the jewels.

The Adharans grabbed him, throwing him back. Shure struggled. An Adharan caught hold of his Slem rifle and twisted it out of his hands.

Barnes fired. A group of Adharans puffed out of existence. Nelson was down on one knee, firing at the passage entrance. The passage was choked with Adharans. Some were firing back. Thin heat beams cut over Nelson's head.

"They can't get us," Barnes gasped. "They're afraid to fire. Because of the jewels."

The Adharans were retreating into the passage, away from the hold. Those with weapons were being ordered back by the commander.

Shure snatched Nelson's rifle and blasted a knot of Adharans into particles. The Adharans were closing the passage. They rolled heavy emergency plates into position and welded them rapidly in-

to place.

"Burn a hole," Shure barked. He turned his gun on the wall of the ship. "They're trying to seal us in here."

Barnes turned his gun on the wall. The two Slem beams ate into the side of the ship. Abruptly the wall gave way, a circular hole falling out.

OUTSIDE the ship Terran soldiers were fighting with the Adharans. The Adharans were retreating, making their way back as best they could, firing and hopping. Some of them hopped up onto their ship. Others turned and fled, throwing their guns down. They milled about in helpless confusion, running and leaping in all directions, clicking wildly.

The parked cruiser glowed into life, its heavy guns lowering into position.

"Don't fire," Shure ordered through his phone. "Leave their ship alone. It isn't necessary."

"They're finished," Nelson gasped, jumping onto the ground. Shure and Barnes leaped after him, out of the Adharan ship onto the surface. "They don't have a chance. They don't know how to fight."

Shure waved a group of Terran soldiers over to him. "Over here! Hurry up, damn it."

Milky jewels were spilling out of the ship onto the ground, rolling

and bouncing through the hole. Part of the containing struts had been blasted away. Stacks of jewels cascaded down and rolled around their feet, getting in their way.

Barnes scooped one up. It burned his gloved hand faintly, tingling his fingers. He held it to the light. The globe was opaque. Vague shapes swam in the milky fire, drifting back and forth. The globe pulsed and glowed, as if it were alive.

Nelson grinned at him. "Really something, isn't it?"

"Lovely." Barnes picked up another. On the hull of the ship an Adharan fired down at him futilely. "Look at them all. There must be thousands of them."

"We'll get one of our merchant ships here and have them loaded up," Shure said. "I won't feel safe until they're on their way back to Terra."

Most of the fighting had ceased. The remaining Adharans were being rounded up by the Terran soldiers.

"What about them?" Nelson said.

Shure did not answer. He was examining one of the jewels, turning it over and over. "Look at it," he murmured. "Brings out different colors each way you hold it. Did you ever see anything like it?"

THE big Terran freighter bumped to a landing. Its loading hatches dropped down. Jitney cars rumbled out, a fleet of stubby trucks. The jitney cars crossed to the Adharan ship. Ramps dropped into place, as robot scoops prepared to go to work.

"Shovel them up," Silvanus Fry rumbled, crossing over to Captain Shure. The Manager of Terran Enterprises wiped his forehead with a red handkerchief. "Astonishing haul, Captain. Quite a find." He put out his moist palm and they shook.

"I can't understand how we could have missed them," Shure said. "The Adharans walked in and picked them up. We watched them going from one planet to the next, like some sort of honey bee. I don't know why our own teams didn't find them."

Fry shrugged. "What does it matter?" He examined one of the jewels, tossing it up in the air and catching it. "I imagine every woman on Terra will have one of these around her neck—or will want one of these around her neck. In six months they won't know how they ever lived without them. That's the way people are, Captain." He put the globe into his briefcase, snapping it shut. "I think I'll take one home to my own wife."

The Adharan commander was brought over by a Terran soldier. He was silent, clicking nothing. The surviving Adharans had been stripped of their weapons and allowed to resume work on their ship. They had got the hull patched and most of the corrosion repaired.

"We're letting you go," Shure said to the Adharan commander. "We could try you as pirates and shoot you, but there wouldn't be much point in it. Better tell your government to stay out of the Sirius system from now on."

"He can't understand you," Barnes said mildly.

"I know. This is a formality. He gets the general idea, though."

The Adharan commander stood silently waiting.

"That's all." Shure waved impatiently toward the Adharan ship. "Go on. Take' off. Clear out of here. And don't come back."

The soldier released the Adharan. The Adharan made his way slowly back to his ship. He disappeared through the hatch. The Adharans working on the hull of the ship gathered up their equipment and followed their commander inside.

The hatches closed. The Adharan ship shuddered, as its jets roared into life. Awkwardly it lifted from the surface, rising up into the sky. It turned, heading toward

outer space.

Shure watched it until it was gone.

"That's that." He and Fry walked rapidly toward the cruiser. "You think these jewels will attract some attention on Terra?"

"Of course. Is there any doubt?"

"No." Shure was deep in thought. "They got to only five of the ten planets. There should be more on the remaining inner planets. After this load gets back to Terra we can begin work on the inner planets. If the Adharans found them we should be able to."

Fry's eyes glittered behind his glasses. "Fine. I didn't realize there would be more."

"There are." Shure frowned, rubbing his jaw. "At least, there ought to be."

"What's wrong?"

"I can't understand why we never found them."

Fry clapped him on the back. "Don't worry!"

Shure nodded, still deep in thought. "But I can't understand why we never found them ourselves. Do you think it means anything?"

THE Adharan commander sat at his control screen, adjusting his communication circuits.

The Check Base on the second planet of the Adharan system came into focus. The commander rais-

ed the sound cone to his neck.

"Bad luck."

"What occurred?"

"Terrans attacked us and seized the balance of our cargo."

"How much was still aboard?"

"Half. We had been to only five of the planets."

"That's unfortunate. They took the load to Terra?"

"I presume."

Silence for a time. "How warm is Terra?"

"Fairly warm, I understand."

"Maybe it will work out all right. We didn't contemplate any hatching on Terra, but if—"

"I don't like the idea of Terrans having a good part of our next generation. I'm sorry we hadn't gotten farther in the distribution."

"Don't worry. We'll petition the Mother to lay a whole new group to make up for it."

"But what would the Terrans want with our eggs? Nothing but trouble will come, when hatching begins. I can't understand them. Terran minds are beyond comprehension. I shudder to think what it will be like when the eggs hatch. —And on a humid planet, hatching should begin fairly soon . . ."

The End



"Ok, professor, so you made a girl—now make me care!"



THE MINUS WOMAN

By

Russ Winterbotham

What made the mass of this tiny asteroid fluctuate in defiance of all known physical laws? It was an impossible fact—but then, so was the girl who they knew couldn't exist!

RED BREWER had plugged his electric razor into the lab circuit and he was running it over his pink jowls while I tried to discover what was haywire about the balance scales.

"Have you noticed," Red said above the clatter of his shaver, "how much less you have to shave on an asteroid?"



"I still shave every day," I said. There was something definitely wrong with the scales. The ten gram weight didn't balance two five gram weights. Instead it weighed 7.5 grams. And then, suddenly, the cockeyed scales would get ornery and the two five gram weights would weigh 7.5 grams and the ten gram slug would weigh what it should.

"I don't," said Red. "I shave once a week. Back on terra I shaved every day, but not here. And I don't even have a beard to show for it."

I didn't answer. There were tougher problems on my mind than whiskers, but of course Red Brewer wouldn't understand them. He was good at machinery, and with a camera, and for company on a lonely asteroid which right now was 300,000,000 miles from the earth, but he certainly wasn't a brain.

"What do you make of it, Jay?" he asked. "Oh, Mr. Hayling, I'm speaking to you."

"Maybe it's your thyroid," I said. "Shut up."

"I'm twenty-seven," said Red. "Too old to have thyroids."

"You mean adenoids."

Red growled and shut off the razor. He ran his hand over his face. "I've got a face like a school kid's," he said. "If there was only a girl on this god-for-

saken piece of rock to see it."

There were no girls on Asteroid 57GM. This place didn't have anything excepting a lonely shack with paper-thin walls made of special heat insulating material. There wasn't a blade of grass; not a puff of wind; no soil for violets; not even a symmetrical shape, it was lopsided like a beaten-up baseball. Or at least that was what I thought until something happened to the balance scales.

The idea of sending Jay Hayling, which is me, and ruddy Red Brewer to Asteroid 57GM, was simply to check up on some figures which said that this little 10-mile chunk of rock didn't have the right mass. Twice it had been clocked on near passages to Jupiter and twice it had behaved differently, as if it had suddenly lost some of its mass. So Red and I had been sentenced to fifteen months alone in space on an asteroid just to find out that somebody had made a mistake in arithmetic.

The sonar equipment showed what kind of rock it was—iron and basalt. And I'd made borings which checked. We'd tested the speed of escape which was a good push so we had to be careful, and its force of gravity, which wasn't much. And then I'd discovered that the balance in the lab had a habit of being 25 per cent wrong one way or the other every time

I tried to use it.

Red put away his razor and went through the little door leading to the living quarters. The partition was crystal clear plastic so I could see him pulling himself along by the hand rail toward the book case. I knew he would presently find himself something to read while I worked.

WE seldom walked in the laboratory. Our muscles, conditioned by terrestrial gravity, were too strong for walking. We'd have bumped our heads on the ceiling at every step and possibly we might even have punched a hole in the roof, losing our air. So we sort of pulled ourselves along by a system of hand rails on all of the anchored desks, furniture and walls. It was like pulling yourself along the bottom of the ocean by hanging onto rocks, since the air in the lab was dense enough to support our almost weightless bodies.

I checked the scales every way I could and finally gave up. I'd tackle the problem again tomorrow. Maybe something on the asteroid, some magnetic rock or something, threw it off. I washed my hands in the laboratory sink and then, while I wiped them on a towel, glanced at Red, who was lying on his bunk reading. For the first time I noticed how skinny he was

getting. Lack of exercise, I presumed. We were going to have to do something to build up our muscles again. I supposed I had lost weight just as much as he had. It would be tough to weigh ourselves here, since we had only the balance in the laboratory. Spring scales wouldn't work on the asteroid—we wouldn't have weighed enough to register, even though our mass was probably about the same as an average man's on earth.

Red put the book aside, closed his eyes and smiled. My eyes fell on the book for some reason. Then suddenly I saw a page flip over. I didn't realize at first that this couldn't happen.

There wasn't any draft in the place, I was sure of that. A draft would mean a leak in the laboratory and alarms would tell us when that happened. There was no motion, nothing to cause a page in the book to turn.

Another page turned and I was sure I wasn't dreaming. I pulled myself over to the door, opened it a trifle.

"Red!" I called softly.

"Dollie!" He was dreaming. Dollie was one of the dozen or so girls he was always talking about in his sleep.

I pulled myself to his side and punched him gently. Red woke up. "You're a hell of a guy," he said.

"Yes," I said. "You were dreaming about Dollie. But I saw something happen here and I wanted you to see it too." I pointed at the book. The pages were still now. Suddenly one of them flipped over.

"Somebody, or something is reading your book," I said.

WE didn't figure it out then and I wasn't even sure that I'd made the right diagnosis, but things went on every day afterwards that left me convinced there was something else living on this hunk of rock besides Red and me. It didn't have mass, apparently, because we tried our best to touch it.

Once when it got to fooling around with the laboratory balance, Red and I encircled the balance with our arms and then squeezed together without feeling a thing.

It wasn't energy, because we tried every instrument to detect electricity, heat, light, and radio. But it was alive, because it moved. It read books and monkeyed with the lab scales.

And at last I decided that maybe *it* had something to do with the apparent discrepancy in the asteroid's change in mass. After that I had a great deal to work on.

Red began behaving queerly too. He swore that he was getting

too small for his clothing. His shoes, he said, were almost a size too large. I was too busy to check, so I put it down as a loss in weight.

We'd spent a year on the asteroid when we were due to pass Mars. So our first anniversary was spent in checking our movements with a telescope, a camera and a chronometer. We discovered our mass—or that of Asteroid 57GM — had depreciated another 25 per cent. It now had only half the mass it was supposed to have. This was too much of an error for even a grade school student.

"I'll bet some astronomers back on earth will get redder than my hair when we get home," Red said.

I shook my head. "It hasn't anything to do with their observations," I said. "It's what is happening now to you and me. We're losing mass somehow."

There was only one way to check it and that was to weigh ourselves. So I rigged up a rude sort of a balance by weighing out chunks of rock until we had a mass equal to what we should weigh, placing them on a teeter-totter arrangement I rigged up in the lab.

"It'll be close enough to learn if we've lost half our mass," I said.

Red showed a weight loss equal to about 20 pounds on earth. I had gained a little weight. These

figures were only relative, and dependent on whether or not the rocks we'd used on the balance had lost mass also. But something was wrong with Red and I decided to watch him carefully.

"Your scales are cockeyed," Red said. "I feel fine. Never felt better, in fact. Except that I'm lonesome . . . not that I don't enjoy your company, pal, ole pal, but I'd like Dollie's better."

Something on the far side of the room caught my eye. It was along the glass partition between the lab and the living room. It might have been a reflection of some sort, because the sun was up and its beams were coming right through the transparent roof at that moment. But for a fleeting instant I thought I saw a figure there. A tall, shapely, black-haired girl, dressed in a flowing robe of orange. The next instant she was gone.

I said I thought it might be a reflection, but I was pretty sure it wasn't. "Red," I said. "We've got company."

"Huh?"

"I'm sure of it, Red. There's somebody else here besides us."

"There's no one else. You're crazy." Red looked around the room. Then he looked at me. His gaze was sharp and penetrating.

"You can't see it now," I said. "But I'm sure I saw something. A woman. Over there." I pointed

to where I'd seen the thing that might have been a reflection.

"Maybe you'd better lie down, Jay. You've been working too hard. A year out on this rock could make a man see King Solomon's harem."

"No, Red," I said. "Those funny things we saw, your book pages turning; the cockeyed balance; maybe your loss of weight. They aren't natural. Something is here and what I just saw makes me think it's human and it's trying to get in touch with us."

Red's stomach muscles squeezed with laughter and he held onto a guard rail to keep from being sent across the room by the exertion.

"What I saw was a woman, Red," I went on.

Red laughed out loud and hung on again. "I could use a babe," he said. Suddenly he jerked. "Who hit me?" he asked. Across his face was a red welt, the shape of a woman's hand.

WE called them "manifestations" after that and Red called her his ghost sweetheart, although the slap had convinced him it wasn't a ghost. Red's getting slapped was the first indication that perhaps this thing did have matter of some sort, but its ability to remain invisible made it appear that the matter wasn't the ordin-

any kind.

Finally I came up with some sort of an answer. It was just a crazy idea and there was no way to prove that I was right. I tried to explain it to Red, who didn't know much about atomic physics, but he seemed to get the idea.

"You see, Red, it could be *negative matter*," I explained.

"What's that?"

"Well, you know what an electron is, I suppose, a negatively charged sub-atomic particle?"

Red nodded.

"And a proton, which is positively charged?"

Again he nodded.

"Well, scientists have learned that there could be positive electrons, as well as negative, and negative protons. In other words each sub-atomic particle has a 'minus quantity' counterpart."

"You're saying it, I'm believing it," said Red. "A guy's gotta believe something."

"Well, this leads to a great deal of speculation. If these minus quantities got together they might form a minus matter."

"You've got me in a hole, so I'm minus too."

"You don't have to understand it, but try to imagine that two universes could exist side by side, one minus, one plus, and that neither could be aware of the other. Every star, every planet and ev-

ery speck of matter could have its counterpart, but neither would be aware of that counterpart's existence."

Red grinned and shook his head. "Crazy," he said.

"Yes, crazy. But dig this, supposing that some sixth sense made it possible for one of our minus counterparts to get in contact with us through extra-sensory perception."

"How'd they do it?" Red asked.

"I don't know. We don't know how to do it, but it may be that our scientific progress wouldn't keep abreast of each other. We might know more than our minus counterparts in some fields, and they might know more in others. But their special knowledge enabled them to bridge the gap briefly—long enough to see us, and watch us—"

"And read our books." Red nodded.

"And perhaps learn our language—remember you got slapped."

"I'll watch it," said Red.

"There's no reason why the gap couldn't be bridged. Science and minds have done a lot of things that looked impossible."

We went to bed on that and all night long I dreamed of negative universes, with suns like old Sol except that they shone black in bright heavens and planets of space floating in vacuums of mat-

ter. Red must have dreamed about it too, because he had a question over the dehydrated ham and eggs the next morning.

"Does that explain the loss in mass for this asteroid?"

"I think it does. Either the method our minus counterparts have in bridging the gap, or perhaps some sort of space warp that permits them to do it. At any rate enough of the minus world has been projected through to our side of the equation to displace the mass of this planet. Our lab scales being haywire might be the result of a being's nearness to it, or something."

Red didn't digest it all, but I could see he was thinking. "I wonder what all this has to do with my whiskers," he mused.

We were busy making some further checks on the planetoid's mass later in the day when Red got a glimpse of the vision I'd seen. Red didn't take it quietly. He yelled loud and pointed.

I turned just in time to see her fade away. It was the same woman, dressed the same. But this time she had been a bit more than a vapor.

Red forgot where he was and made a dive toward her. His body shot like a bullet across the room, skimming over laboratory equipment, and his head crashed solidly against the telescope.

Red literally bounced back half-way again. Then a long thin arm seemed to reach out of nowhere and seize him by the jacket and hold him long enough to stop him.

Red drifted down to the floor, knocked cold.

IT had happened so swiftly that I hadn't had time to move. Now I pulled myself toward Red. The arm was still there in space, and it had added a shoulder, a rather pretty shoulder. Next there was a body, clothed in the flowing orange cape, and finally a woman's head. It was the same one—the minus woman.

"It's true," I said.

The woman seemed to understand. "Yes," she said. "All that you told Red Brewer is true, Jay Hayling. For you, I am a minus woman. For me, you are a minus man. But we have bridged the gap. For the first time in eternity, plus and minus, positive and negative, can meet on even terms."

"Better not come too close," I said.

"Nothing will happen," she replied. "We are now alike." She stooped toward the fallen figure on the floor. "Help me with this child. He's unconscious."

"Child!" I said. "If he's a child, they grow 'em big in the minus world."

But as I lifted Jay off the floor

I wondered if he was as big as I'd always thought. It wasn't his weight. Nothing weighed very much on this asteroid, but it was his frail body. He seemed to be a boy of sixteen, rather than a man stationed 300,000,000 miles in space.

I carried him out of the laboratory into the living quarters and placed him on his bunk. I loosened his clothing, noting at the time that he had been right about his garments not fitting him.

"You've made him lose weight," I said.

"What makes you think so?" the woman asked.

"Because every screwy thing that has happened since we came here a year ago must have an explanation."

The woman smiled. "Don't think too harshly of me." She looked very solid now. Her body

had lost that tenuous look. She was no longer nebulous and cloud-like. "Certain things were necessary in order for me to proceed safely through the gap between the positive and negative worlds," she explained.

I looked at Red again. His face was smooth and I knew he hadn't shaved in more than a week. "You've made him younger," I said. "Well, he shouldn't kick at that."

The woman nodded. "I turned the young man inside out. In a moment the transition will be complete. You will be our next entrance to this universe . . ."

From Red's bunk came a wail. A bawl, like a tiny baby. A dying baby.

Some people die of age. Red died an infant. As for the minus woman—she was murdered on an asteroid.



"He said he was a rocket expert, but that's all he's been doing for the past six months!"

★ *Bowmen Of Space* ★

THE greatest adventure—building Space Station No. 1—isn't as far from reality as some might think, and to get a glimpse into the Top Secret files of the Army might be an interesting experience. Regardless of that however, engineers are already planning the tactics publicly which they will use when the order to go to work is given.

Aside from the problems of rockets, fuels and so forth, the construction of an artificial satellite around the Earth is going to involve men in the most unique experience of all—working without gravity! That this will pose some tricky problems no one doubts—

but they've already been solved.

Perhaps the neatest example of this is the idea of using a crossbow for a rope-thrower! Any building work requires cables and ropes, even in space and to get them from one point to another there is no better method than shooting them from a crossbow—just like spearing fish on Earth! The engineers have planned the blunt-headed arrows, decided on the type of thin flexible line, and they know that the use of the crossbow is as practical a method as can be suggested. Who knows what other ancient techniques will be used besides Bowmen of Space!

* * *



"Place mail in compartment—press buttons A and B—"

DOGFIGHT - 1973

By

Mack Reynolds

Flying at 1600 m.p.h. you act with split second timing after you sight the enemy. And you're allowed only one mistake — your last!

MY radar picked him up when he was about five hundred miles to my north-northeast and about forty-five miles above me. I switched the velocity calculator on him as fast as I could reach it.

The enemy ship was doing sixteen, possibly even sixteen and a half. I took the chance that it was most likely an Ivar Interceptor, at that speed, and punched out a temporary evasion pattern with my right hand while with my left I snapped an Ivar K-12 card into my calculator along with his estimated speed, altitude and distance. It wasn't much to go on as yet but he couldn't have much more on me, if as much; inwardly I congratulated myself on the quick identification I'd managed.

He was near enough now for

my visor screen to pick him up. At least he was alone, that was something. My nearest squadron mate was a good minute and a half away. It might as well have been a century.

Now, this is what is always hard to get over to a civilian; the time element. Understand, it will take me a while to tell this but it all took less than sixty seconds to happen.

He had guessed my evasion pattern already—either guessed it or had some new calculator that was far and beyond anything our techs were turning out. I could tell he'd anticipated me by the Bong-Sonic roll he slipped into.

I quickly punched up a new pattern based on the little material I had in the calculator. At least I'd caught the roll. I punched that up, hurriedly, slipped it into the

IBM, guessed that his next probability was a pass, took a chance on that and punched it in.

I was wrong there. He didn't take his opportunity for a front-on pass. He was either newly out of their academy or insultingly confident. My lips felt tight as I canceled the frontal pass card, punched up two more to take its place.

The base supervisor cut in on the phone. "It looks like old Dmitri himself, Jerry, and he's flying one of the new K-12a models. Go get him, boy!"

I felt like snapping back. He knew better than to break in on me at a time like this. I opened my mouth, then shut it again. Did he say K-12a? *Did he say K-12a?*

I squinted at the visor screen. The high tail, the canopy, the oddly shaped wing tanks.

I'd gone off on the identification!

I slapped another evasion pattern into the controls, a standard set, I had no time to punch up an improvisation. But he was on me like a wasp. I rejected it, threw in another set. Reject. Another!

Even as I worked, I kicked the release on my own calculator, dumped it all, selected like a flash an Ivar K-12a card, and what other estimations I could make while my mind was busy with the full time job of evasion.

My hands were still making the motions, my fingers were flicking here, there, my feet touching here, there. But my heart wasn't in it.

He already had such an advantage that it was all I could do to keep him in my visor screen. He was to the left, to the right. I got him for a full quarter-second in the wires, but the auto gunner was too far behind, much too far.

His own guns flicked red.

I punched half a dozen buttons, slapped levers, tried to scoot for home.

To the left of my cubicle two lights went yellowish and at the same time my visor screen went dead. I was blind.

I sank back in my chair, helpless.

THE speed indicator wavered, went slowly, deliberately to zero; the altimeter died; the fuel gauge. Finally, even the dozen or so trouble-indicators here, there, everywhere about the craft. Fifteen million dollars worth of warcraft was being shot into wreckage.

I sat there for a long, long minute and took it.

Then I got to my feet and wearily opened the door of my cubicle. Sergeant Walters and the rest of the maintenance crew were standing there. They could read

in my face what had happened.

The sergeant began, "Captain, I . . ."

I grunted at him. "Never mind, Sergeant. It had nothing to do with the ship's condition." I turned to head for the operations office.

Bill Dickson strolled over from the direction of his own cubicle. "Somebody said you just had a scramble with old Dmitri himself."

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know if it was him or not. Maybe some of you guys can tell a man's flying but I can't."

He grinned at me. "Shot you down, eh?"

I didn't answer.

He said, "What happened?"

"I thought it was an Ivar K-12, and I put that card in my calcul-

ator. Turned out it was one of those new models, K-12a. That was enough, of course."

Bill grinned at me again. "That's two this week. That flak got you near that bridge and now you get . . ."

"Shut up," I told him.

He counted up on his fingers elaborately. "The way I figure it, you lose one more ship and you're an enemy ace."

He was irrepressible. "Damn it," I said, "will you cut it out! I've got enough to worry about without you working me over. This means I'll have to spend another half an hour in operations going over the fight. And that means I'll be late for dinner again. And you know Molly."

Bill sobered. "Gee," he said, "I'm sorry. War is hell, isn't it?"



"Simmer down, babe, you're cracking my helmet!"

★ Atomic Battery ★

THE dream of science has always been to turn energy directly into electricity, without the medium of rotating machinery, steam plants or water wheels. A thermo-couple will do this, so will a photocell. But the yield of energy is so small as to be impracticable.

With the coming of atomic energy the same hope was held. Turn atomic energy directly into electricity—and recently this has been done—but again on a very feeble scale! But at least it is a beginning.

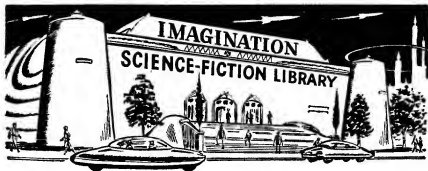
The atomic battery consists of a pair of electrodes immersed in a

gas, with the whole apparatus located near a source of radioactivity—a piece of material or even an atomic pile. The radiations from the radioactive source ionize the gas, that is, tear electrons from it, where they proceed to the electrodes—and presto, you have a battery!

This atomic battery is feeble—a battery the size of a cubic yard will only light an electric light bulb. But the promise is there and the device is highly useful for instrumentation. The step is slight but it is in the right direction. Someday we will operate homes and cars from atomic batteries!



"This planetoid will never be a success—it would cost too much to build a golf course!"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Mark Reinsberg

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review selected books as a guide to your recommended reading list.

WEST OF THE SUN

by Edgar Pangborn. Doubleday. \$2.75.

First interstellar spaceship, containing Earth men and women, lands on the planets of an unspecified star, with the intention of setting up a colony. They find two primitive humanoid peoples — a race of pigmies and giants; they learn each other's languages and achieve peaceful relations. Even though the ship, with most of their tools, books and provisions, is lost the planet's environment is benevolent, children are born, and the colonists adjust to the situation.

But in an attempt to unify and educate the indigenous stone-age population, there is a split among the Earthmen. So far, the story holds interest. Then follows a long

and tedious exegesis on jungle warfare, relating more to Tarzan's Africa than to science-fiction. Eventually, a rational community of the three races comes about, and another colonizing ship arrives.

The book ends with an appropriate and unusual symposium, somewhat in the style of a Platonic dialog, on the building of a Good Society. This brings forward some of the author's own social views. The result is a fine Utopia presentation, and a welcome example of how science-fiction can be turned into a vehicle for the expression of ideas. Elsewhere, the style is not always coherent, nor are the characters especially alive, but the book is nevertheless a worthwhile experience.

THE CURRENTS OF SPACE

by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday. \$2.75

A spatio-analyst with a new theory that will upset the social and economic status quo in one strategic corner of the galaxy, is shanghaied and administered a psychic probe which strips his brain of all post-natal impressions. Then he's dumped on Florina, a slave planet, and left to fight his way back, to partial mental recovery.

Meanwhile he becomes the pivot in a power struggle between the rulers of Sark (who have Florina under their domination) and the imperialistic expansion of Trantor,

largest political unit in the galaxy.

The unfortunate spatio-analyst happens to be an Earthman, in a future period that no longer recalls that planet as man's starting point. He's very credibly portrayed, as is the economy and social organization of Florina. The Earthman's female companion is a little farcical, but all the other characterizations ring true — especially some of the minor ones such as Markis Genro and Lady Samia.

Action is fast, and as a whole, pretty exciting. This book is in the "read-at-one-sitting" class.

THE CONTINENT MAKERS

by L. Sprague de Camp. Twayne. \$2.95.

World War III has reduced the U. S. to a second-class power, eliminated the U.S.S.R. as a power altogether, and raised Brazil to a position of planetary leadership in the hundred-year period — 2054 to 2153—in which these stories are embedded. It's an era of peace and far-flung interstellar colonialism, with lurid cultural contact between Earthmen and aliens.

This is a collection of seven short yarns and a novelette, all independent of one another, but sharing the same historical background: a government-owned space transport system called "Viagens Interplanetarias," and the legacy of Brazilian space pioneering, which has resulted in Portuguese nameplaces strewn throughout planets of neighboring stars. Some of the planets have environments and natives rather like those of the Amazonian

jungle. There, Earth's entrepreneurs spend time furthering commerce and, when necessary, eluding native vengeance.

De Camp's style is witty and entertaining as he develops amusing science-fiction take-offs on such themes as sea piracy, head-hunters, the wild west, and jousting knighthood. Spiced with glamorous otherworldly women, the stories usually feature some benign boulder attempting to exploit the natives, contrary to "Viagens" regulations.

The title story in the collection loses momentum half-way through, but the shorts are consistently ingenious. Readers will especially enjoy meeting those interstellar swindlers, Darius Koshay and Felix Borel. These are real characters, in the creation of which de Camp has obviously taken—as he has certainly given—great pleasure. An enjoyable book.



Conducted by Mari Wolf

IT'S about seven in the morning when you leave Los Angeles and head out through the San Fernando Valley, Palmdale, Lancaster—the little desert towns that are now becoming aircraft industry centers. The traffic is quite heavy until you leave Lancaster behind, but from there on it's real desert country, with Joshua trees gnarled and ancient in the early morning sunlight. The little town of Mojave lies ahead, but you don't go that far. You turn off onto a side road, then off that onto a narrow rutted dirt road, more twists and turns — and finally you're there.

The Pacific Rocket Society Test Area.

You notice the launching tower first. It's red steel, latticed, forty feet tall, and if you're feeling adventurous you can climb all the way to the top and look down on

the rest of the Test Area. It's quite a climb. The Quonset hut and the prefabricated house, which together house the members and their shop equipment, fall away beneath you, and when you're up there on top it gives you a start to realize that your average rocket will be free of the tower in less than a second. About half a second, really.

Squatted down well below you is the concrete blockhouse, where the firing crew takes shelter when a rocket firing is actually under way. And outside the barbed wire fence of the area proper you might see the foxholes dug in the desert sand, for spectator use during firings. And the long bleached line of the air strip, which the Long Beach members have just finished clearing and leveling so that they can fly in and out of the area. (No, not rockets yet; they use old fash-

ioned airplanes!)

There probably won't be any firings the morning you're there. There's a lot of work going into every rocket that finally reaches the launching tower. Especially when the builders are an amateur group—although many of the members are engineers in allied fields in their professional life.

First, once the design is completed, there's the rocket to build. If you were part of an Army program, that part of it would be simple. Lots of money, for one thing. Time, and equipment, for another. But a group like the PRS has to work with limited materials and limited funds—and the more you can improvise, the better.

For instance, there's the wood-burning rocket now under construction by some of the members. At first thought a wood-burning vehicle seems a little incongruous—more in the Stanley Steamer stage (although a Stanley Steamer can do a hundred miles an hour.) But then you realize that anything burns explosively in liquid oxygen. Even so, this rocket will never be an extremely high performance one—but it will be easy to build, relatively inexpensive, and once the bugs are ironed out it can be mass produced and fired over and over during tests of telemetering and other equipment.

It doesn't do just to build a rocket and fire it off and watch it climb out of sight and vanish into the troposphere. You'll want to be able to track it, to find out how high it goes, and how fast, and where it lands, so you'll be able to recover it. If you're lucky, and

if your parachute recovery system works, you'll be able to recover it more or less intact. And above all you'll want to know how it performed—if it lived up to its theoretical expectations, and if not, why not. Then, when you build your next rocket, you can correct for the bugs.

Of course, the rockets here at the PRS firing range won't climb as high as the V-2's and similar types. They're smaller, for one thing. And far less expensive. But they'll travel about as fast as a V-2, over a shorter flight period.

If you've ever watched movies of a V-2 firing you've probably noticed how slowly it rises from the ground, the way it seems to balance on its exhaust stream for a moment before deliberately and with increasing acceleration climbs to the top of the tower. Its initial acceleration isn't much over 1 G (and of course at 1 G it would remain at rest.)

A PRS rocket won't take off like that. It develops its velocity fast, and will be traveling at about 5 G's acceleration by the time it is free of the tower. Because in a small relatively inexpensive rocket you can't have gyro stability, and you'll need speed and the resulting air drag to hold your course up through the atmosphere. (There's a big disadvantage, of course. The rocket expends much of its precious fuel fighting the air drag, and by the time it is up where the air is thin it's near cut-off, with its fuel about exhausted.)

AMATEUR rocket enthusiasts don't have illusions about their

work. The first moon-rocket, for instance, obviously won't come from the PRS firing grounds. The days of inventors with ideas who whip up world shaking gadgets out in the back yard are doubtless well in the past. Building rockets now is even very unlike building them back in the thirties. They're accepted. They're no longer the visionary things they were when Willy Ley and the other pioneers of the German Rocket Society were struggling with the basic problems of fuel and mass ratio and combustion chambers—and the equally basic problem of finding an area in Germany where they could fire their "toys."

Now we have White Sands and Point Mugu and many another center, their government sponsored programs working far in advance of anything amateur groups can do in the way of altitude flights, of increasing size, or of expensive precision equipment.

And the main obstacle to space stations, and ultimately to space flight, right now is money.

But there's a lot that amateurs can do—both as a hobby and as a means of learning more about rocketry and acquiring the skills that will undoubtedly become reduced to assembly line mechanicalness in the coming age of space flight.

A club like the PRS has room for every type of rocket enthusiast. There are boys in their teens, designing their first rockets, maybe going over a lot of ground that has been previously covered, but adding their own touches, and working ultimately into a far broader grasp of astronautics than was possible to any but the most advanced theo-

rists of yesterday. There are people working with small, relatively simple rockets in order to test and improve other equipment—electronic tracking systems for use in recording flight data, methods for opening and closing fuel valves during flight, variations in configuration or in fuel mixture, etc . . .

Then there are the people working on the major rocket projects such as the current SRV, or Standard Research Vehicle. Here you are really working to close tolerances. And most of the parts have to be homemade. The designing, itself, has already taken a long time. The SRV is an unusual rocket in that it's solid-liquid fueled—thiakol rubber and liquid oxygen—in contrast to most rockets, which utilize the combustion of either two liquids or a mixed solid. The fuel and combustion chamber presented new problems . . .

The SRV will have a booster, a short duration, high-thrust rocket from which the main rocket is fired. The booster will fire for about nine seconds, and then fall back to Earth as the SRV takes over, its velocity added to that already obtained from the booster, with the weight and drag of the empty booster left behind.

This type of rocket is comparatively efficient. In fact, proposals for Earth satellite stations usually call for a multi-stage rocket, **only** the last stage of which ever reaches orbital velocity. But a rocket of this sort is also complicated to build and to synchronize so that its ignition system will fire the second stage at the proper time and cut the first stage free.

So before the SRV is ever fired

there will be many tests. There will be static tests of the booster—tests in which the booster is held down when fired and its thrust and pressures calculated. There will be static tests of the main SRV. And there will probably be flight tests of the booster with a mock SRV—a wooden mock-up of the same weight and shape as the final rocket.

You don't want to wait until the actual firing to find out what's wrong.

The firing time itself will be very short. The rocket will be in the launching tower, and the firing crew in the blockhouse, off to one side. The rocket will be counted down—three, two, one, and then someone will throw a switch. The rocket will be out of the tower in half a second; the booster will cut off after nine seconds and fall back to Earth, its parachute the only visible sign that a firing took place, for the SRV will be well out of sight, still firing, still climbing.

In about forty seconds its fuel will be gone. It will still climb, coasting upward, slowed now by gravity, already reaching the area of thinner air and reduced drag. If you're lucky, and if the visual tracking system—the theodolites—function well, you may see it climb to the top of its trajectory. You probably won't. Probably its presence will be recorded only as blips on the electronic tracking devices. It will climb, slowing now, reach the top of its trajectory and fall over to coast back toward Earth. As it falls into the heavier layers of the atmosphere nearer the ground a switch will throw

and the parachute open. You probably won't see that either. Again it will be the electronic trackers that will tell you where it is landing.

It will be a bent, spent thing in the desert sand when you recover it.

Months of work have gone toward those few minutes, and now they're over. Now there is more data to correlate, more factors to take into consideration for the next model, and if the test was successful there's a sense of shared creation. And the memory of the rocket in its swift climb away from the tower.

And the feeling of tomorrow, when space ships to the planets will be commonplace, and amateur groups like the PRS will, perhaps, be looking to the stars . . .

New to the fan magazine reviews for this month.

* * *

PACIFIC ROCKET SOCIETY BULLETIN: 25c; monthly; Freddie Curtis, 428 S. Verdugo Rd., Glendale 5, Calif. The official publication of the PRS, the Bulletin details the technical work in progress on club-sponsored rockets, gives information on club meetings, field trips, and guest speakers, and also runs articles on astronautics of interest to serious rocket enthusiasts.

Unless your interest in rocketry is comparatively technical you probably wouldn't care for the Bulletin, but if you're really interested you might like to write in for information about becoming a corresponding member of the Society.

* * *

Now before I go on to other

fanzines, there's the important matter of the 1953 Convention.

Over the Labor Day weekend the Eleventh World Science Fiction Convention will take place. You may have noticed in various fanzines and in fanzine reviews how many references are made to the last Convention at Chicago. Just about everyone who came and listened and talked and met other fans, just about everyone went home thinking, "and it's fifty-two whole weeks to Philadelphia . . ."

Well, it's not so long now. And if you haven't sent in your dollar for membership in the Convention Committee to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Penna., you had better do it right away. You'll get the Progress Reports on the Convention, what's going to happen on the program, hotel accommodations and rates. (The Convention hotel, the Bellevue - Stratford, is really going to do everything possible for the fans.)

In short, it's going to be a wonderful sociable Convention, one you'd really be sorry to miss. Try to make it if you possibly can. . . .

* * *

OOPSLA!; 15c; monthly; Gregg Calkins, 1429 Talisman Drive, Salt Lake City 16, Utah. As his first year of publishing Oopsla comes to a close, Gregg celebrates with the Oopslannish!, or anniversary issue. It is just like the regular publication, only more so, both in number of pages and in light-hearted fun.

Shelby Vick's feature, "Dear Alice," takes Alice on a train where she is looking for Chicago and the last Convention, and there's a paragraph of punning that's really

something. It starts with Alice's train of thoughts that lead her to question the conductor — who is made of copper and shockingly uninformed—and continues with her wondering ohm, not knowing watt to do . . .

That's only a sample.

As for a story written as an exchange of letters, Bob Tucker's "The Iron Curtain Drops" is really tops. About Joe Fann in the U.S.A. who writes to Handel C. Ranker, Minister of Mimeographs in Prague, about his difficulties in obtaining Imovar Slobarish's fanzine . . .

It ends with the best punch-paragraph of the fan year.

The cover too—Bob Fultz's portrait of Mars, with, mounted frustratingly at the pole, the sign, "No Parking. R. Bradbury."

* * *

DESTINY: 25c; quarterly; Earl Kemp, 3477 North Clark St., Chicago 13, Ill., or Malcolm Willits, 11848 S.E., Powell Blvd., Portland 66, Oregon.

With its No. 7 issue Destiny goes into a new format—one of the very best looking layouts in the entire field. The art work, both Somme's cover and the interiors, are exceptionally well done and well reproduced, and I especially liked the simple, unrelieved geometrical design that preceded the story "Ornod."

The fiction is good, perhaps the best short being Pat Eaton's "Racial Prejudice." It's an old theme but well written, and very well characterized. Among the articles there are two short answers to the question "Why Conquer Space?"—answers given by men who certain-

ly should know. Willy Ley and Arthur C. Clarke. And Don Day tells of preparing his monumental Index to Science Fiction.

I'm sure that Destiny will continue to live up to its endeavor to present only the best fan fiction, articles, artwork and poetry available. I'm also sure that if you like fan writing at all you'll consider a quarter spent on this zine a quarter well spent. It costs more than that to publish your copy—but the more people who buy and subscribe, the lower the cost per issue.

So why not send in for *your* copy?

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd. Ave., Flushing 54, N.Y. Here in this news-sheet of the stf world, now in its twelfth year of publication, you'll be able to find all the news about fantasy people and publications.

The style of Fantasy-Times has changed with the years. The controversial, feud-type articles are gone. The copy is tightened. And the news value has risen until F-T has become synonymous with everything worth finding out in the science fiction world.

Certainly worth your dime if you're at all news minded.

* * *

SCIENCE-FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; 1745 Kenneth Rd., Glendale 1, Calif. Published bi-monthly. Most amateur magazines that aspire to real quality of format quickly run up against the problem of costs. Many publish at a loss issue after issue—their editors willing to put so much time, effort and money into a publication of

which they can be truly proud. But often the pressures eventually become too heavy and the magazine folds . . .

The Advertiser is a quality publication. With its Morris Scott Dollens covers and its thoughtful, thought-provoking articles (such as Henry Kuttner's exploration of "Science in Fiction" in the issue I have here) it easily maintains its position as one of the best amateur productions in the field. But—it's primarily an advertising medium. Its ads support it. It can thus continue, month after month, year after year.

If you're a serious collector of science fiction you doubtless already subscribe to the Advertiser. If you're not a collector, but a serious reader, interested in the background as well as the fiction of stf, then you too should read the Advertiser. You'll like it.

* * *

VEGA: 10c; monthly; Joel Nydahl; 119 S. Front St., Marquette, Mich. Here's a fanzine that gets bigger and better with each issue. It started out as a rather thin, hectographed zine—but with some fine writing and Joel's special flair as a fanzine editor. Now it's mimeoed, over twenty pages long, with Joel seriously wondering if he shouldn't charge a little more and increase the contents.

I hope he does. Vega's easily worth more than a dime now, and I for one would like to see more of it. (Though a big fanzine with a growing circulation can be awfully hard to handle month after month; it can end up running the editor, instead of vice versa.)

A regular feature in Vega—and

one of the top fan features too—is Marion Bradley's "What Every Young Fan Should Know." In the current issue she has some advice for new fans contemplating joining a fan club.

One thing about Vega—it keeps getting better all the time. You can't go wrong if you send for a copy.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 10c; quarterly; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y. From the vantage point of its fourth year in the fanzine field Spaceship looks over 1952, its prozines and its fans. It's a good review of the big boom in science fiction . . .

Among the other articles of this primarily non-fiction zine there's the incomparable Robert Bloch, with "Who Played the Harp"—about Walt Willis, Irish fan.

And Roger Dard reports from Australia. There's an interesting publishing field down there, from the sound of his review. A truly international flavor, this issue.

* * *

FANTASTIC WORLDS: 25c; Edward W. Ludwig, 1942 Telegraph Ave., Stockton, Calif. Here's the "little" magazine of the science fiction world—the magazine that publishes the off-trail stories of writers like Kris Neville and Wilson (Bob) Tucker. The magazine that maintains a really literary quality in its articles without being the least bit high-hat, and should certainly appeal to anyone who likes good artwork, good fiction, and good features of an imaginative, out of the ordinary style.

Also, Fantastic Worlds gives background material on science

fiction's big names, past and present. There was the article on August Derleth and Arkham House, and Sam Sackett's write-up of the Ackerman story.

An excellent magazine, one you will be proud to show off if your friends want to know what fan publishing can accomplish.

PENDULUM: * * * quarterly; Bill Venable, 610 Park Place, Pittsburgh 9, Pa. Editors Bill Venable and Donald Susan here present a good non-fiction fanzine with articles of special interest to those who like serious features on sf subjects.

The issue I have here, for example, has a well-thought-out bit of information by Joe Gibson. Entitled "The Ridge," it's about the three-dimensional star constellations of space (not the two-dimensional ones that appear grouped together as seen from earth.) The Ridge is the constellation of which Sol is a member—and the old theme of getting lost in space fades into impossibility if you have an easily identifiable star cluster to home in on.

That's just one example of what you'll find in Pendulum.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION BULLETIN: 15c; monthly; Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. Here's a well-balanced fanzine where you'll find stories, columns, articles, and a fine book review section.

I've always liked Raymond L. Clancy's humorous fantasies—and his "The Bar on Boulevard Jones" that I've just finished reading is one of his best. It's truly fantasy,

casually told, logically developed within the framework of its illogical setting—the bar where you rub shoulders with dragons and pterodactyls, and the werewolves get thrown out when they begin to turn.

The Bulletin's a well-varied, mimeoed fanzine that makes a policy of rejecting inferior work and passing on the good material to you, the reader.

* * *

FAN-FARE: 15c; bimonthly; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, N.Y. The all-fiction fanzine still consistently runs some of the best off-trail fantasy fiction you'll find. (Witness Andrew Duane's story last summer, "Dread Huntress." That one deserves anthologizing somewhere.)

As Editor Ganley himself says, Fan-Fare has changed in its more than three years of publication. Many of the same writers still write for it—Duane, Tom Covington, and Terry Carr—but they're writing better. Much better. The neophyte fan writer isn't in Fan-Fare. To get published here you've got to be good.

So if you send for a copy you can know you'll find well-written stories by young writers, some of whose names will probably be in the professional magazines any time now.

* * *

BREVZINE: 10c; monthly; Warren A. Freiberg, 5018 W. 18th. St., Cicero 50, Ill. This erstwhile miniature sized fanzine is now going into a large format. In a way I'll be sorry to see it change—it was always so distinctive, and there was always so much reading matter

packed into its small pages.

But Editor Freiberg promises that there will be even more packed into the new large format. And the price for everything—fiction, Hank Moskowitz's column on "Spatial Relations" and all the rest—will still be only a dime.

* * *

THE SPACEWARPERS: 25c; quarterly; Charles A. Nuetzel, 16452 Moorpark St., Encino, Calif. The issue I have here is the second one put out by this group of young San Fernando Valley fans. Certainly the most striking thing about it is its cover—done multi-colored by the silk-screen process, something you find very rarely. A most effective job, too.

The fanzine itself is mimeoed and contains some short, rather light fiction, book reviews, and articles. Best of all, there's E. Everett Evan's account of how he produced and sold his first novel. It's called "Report on *Man of Many Minds*."

And for all you Burroughs fans, the next issue of Spacewarper is an all ERB issue.

* * *

THE FEMZINE: 15c; quarterly; Marian Cox, 79th. A.B. Sqdn., Sioux City, Iowa. This is the all-girl fanzine. (Men can read it, but they can't write for it, nor belong to the sponsoring club, the Fanettes.)

As Marian says, "The club was established to learn if women can accomplish anything without the aid of male fans." Well, the girls of the Fanettes seem to think so. They're having a fine time, and they're putting out a fanzine that really has that feminine touch.

How about it girls? Care to join up? If you do, just get in touch with Marian . . .

* * *

KAYMAR-TRADER: 10c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 3rd. Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. This is the trading zine formerly known as STF Trader, and here, as before, you can buy advertising space very reasonably either to offer fantasy material for sale or to run a "Wanted" notice for books or magazines.

Also, if you're a collector, you can probably find some items you'll want already listed. The Trader's the place for buying, selling, or swapping your science fiction material.

* * *

SOL: 10c; bimonthly; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Rd., Ridgewood, N. J. In the issue I have here Marion Bradley has a rather provocative article called "The Good in Fan Publishing." It's a rebuttal of sorts of Editor Ish's earlier article about the evils of fan publishing, which he wrote (he says) to try to discourage young fans

from taking up fanzine editing.

Here Marion lists among the benefits to be gained from publishing, "the familiarity one gains with one's own language." I agree, until she goes on to say, "You'd be surprised to discover how few persons really use their training in English after they leave high school." Marion, how many use it while they're *in* high school?

Some people I know don't even dig Pogo . . .

* * *

Well, that's about all there's room for this time, so I'd better close up the Box until next month. I'm trying to review all the fanzines—if not this time, then the next issue—but sometimes it becomes rather difficult, especially if there are forty-plus in the Box at one time . . .

Yes, the science fiction boom has hit fandom too . . .

Keep sending them, all of you. I'll get to them. Just send them to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

See you next month.

—Mari Wolf

FEATURED NEXT MONTH—

THE BUTTONED SKY

By

Geoff St. Reynard

A great new science fiction novel by the talented author of ARMAGEDDON, 1970, BEWARE THE USURPERS! and other widely acclaimed stories. This is a novel of the far future and man's desperate attempt to gain the freedom of not only the stars—but the Earth! Don't miss it—be sure and reserve your copy at your newsdealer—August issue on sale June 30.



"TRIED EVERYTHING — JUST CAN'T GET THOSE
ATOMIC JETS WORKING!"



Letters from the **R**eaders

WOW!—NO WORDS FOR IT . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Allow me to extend my congratulations for putting out one of the best stf magazines on the market. I can't say it is *the* best because I rate my approval on the quality of over-all issues—but I can say that in the time I've been reading Madge it has rated very high with me.

In the February issue EARTH ALERT by Kris Neville was a great story; but coming more up to date, in the May issue which I have just finished reading, THE FIST OF SHIVA was—Wow!—there are no words for it! I finished the story in one sitting.

All of the stories in the issue were good except for EARTH CAN BE FUN by John W. Jakes. This left me disappointed since there was too little science fiction in it.

For an over-all stf magazine, Madge has it over all competitors; I enjoy the editorials, features, and the little articles following stories.

In closing, if THE FIST OF

SHIVA is a sample of Dan Galouye's work, get more by him!

Alan Miller
 590 Moody St.
 Waltham 54, Mass.

Thanks for the kind words, Alan; rest assured we'll try and make Madge an even better magazine in coming issues . . . As to Dan Galouye, he's got many fine stories coming up soon with

CHANGING OUR NAME?

Dear Bill Hamling:

THE FIST OF SHIVA in the May issue of Madge was one novel I couldn't stop reading from the moment I started it. I don't know if it is an original idea, but it's the first novel of its type, I've ever read. Why not have Daniel F. Galouye write a sequel? (If Dan can keep writing stories of this caliber you've got a regular reader from here on!)

A real surprise was finding pictures of the Chicago Science Fiction Convention on the 2nd cover. Why not publish more photos of

the Chicon? Everybody who reads science fiction should be interested in seeing them. Also, keep using cartoons in every issue—they add variety to the magazine.

I see in your letter column that you're thinking of changing the name of the magazine from IMAGINATION to MADGE. Here's a vote against it. Don't change the magazine's fine distinctive title one bit.

The story DOOM SATELLITE struck me as rather old-fashioned. I've read about seven stories in the past year with the same idea. Let's keep Madge's yarns on the original side . . . Keep up the good work—hard too—of editing a fine stf magazine.

John Truax
1102 9th St.

Rapid City, S. Dak.

The Chicon is pretty much ancient history by now, John—but we'll publish pictures of the forthcoming Convention in Philadelphia. Which reminds us, now's the time to make reservations with the committee to attend that gala event. You'll find particulars below. The important thing to remember is—be there! . . . Change our name? Not likely! The item you refer to was simply a jesting remark by inference. Why should we change

the best title in the field? . . . with

JUICY COMMENTS, TO WHIT:

Dear Bill:

I wish I could comment on THE FIST OF SHIVA in the May issue, but I have not had time to read it as yet. I'll let you know later. At the moment I do have some gripes against Madge & Company, so my juicy comments, to whit:

The cover painting on the May issue, by H. W. McCauley, was ballyhooed by you as being the best cover that Madge has yet sported. That was the general thought you tried to put over, I think.—I think it's the worst cover Madge has ever had! And as for McCauley, a usually fine artist, I'm frankly disappointed with him. Some stinkweed should also go to Malcolm Smith, since he's Art Director; he should have known better.

Speaking of covers, the best so far this year was Terry's for the February issue. McCauley's January cover was good but had a bit too much white around it. Terry's April cover was a bit better than his October one of last year. My all-time favorite is Smith's December cover for last year—which reposes over our television set!

11th World Science Fiction Convention

THE TIME: September 5-6-7, 1953 (Labor Day Weekend). THE PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—Bellevue Stratford Hotel. THE PROGRAM: Banquet, costume ball and many other gala festivities for all fans. GUEST OF HONOR: Willy Ley, internationally famed science writer. MEMBERSHIP: \$1.00—send to 11th World STF Convention, Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa. Members receive all Progress Reports—join NOW!

My other gripe concerns Kris Neville. Kris had his first published story in Madge's first issue—or should I say "first story"? He did a novel around a flying saucer cover by Terry for January 1952; he did another novel around another flying saucer cover by Terry for the February 1953 number. It has now come to my attention that he is doing another novel for Madge, again based on a flying saucer cover. (By Terry, no doubt!)

If anything, this shows a bad slip in editorial judgment. I liked both of Neville's saucer stories. But how many times can an author repeat when he's so limited?

I feel sorry for three people: Kris Neville, who, I think, is getting a raw deal; William L. Hamling, who, it appears, still has a long way to go before he becomes a really competent editor; and Madge herself, who will lose face accordingly. To stay monthly*she must maintain a high quality of material, much higher than her present average.

The above words have probably condemned me in your eyes; if so, I'm truly sorry. I like Madge and a chap called *wlh*.

I've tried to say what I think may be helpful criticism. I think Madge is good—but I think she can be better too!

Henry Moskowitz

Three Bridges, N. J.

An interesting letter, Hank, and while you're entitled to your opinions, as everyone is, there are a few facts that need clarification. First, the McCauley cover on the May issue. You didn't like it, so no question there. But we never stated we thought it was to be

*Madge's best cover so far—we said—and we think it's true, that it's the most striking cover Madge has featured. Frankly, we don't think it's the best—never did—but we feel it's a real eye-catcher, the type you'll have to look at more than casually—a striking cover. And don't pass the stinkweed to Malcolm Smith; we personally selected the cover so we'll take the bricks—and bouquets. Fair enough? . . . Now to Kris Neville. Yes, Kris is completing a new cover novel for Madge; but it is not for a "flying saucer" cover as you intimate. It is by Terry—and a fine job if we do say so, so look forward to it. Thus, your following comments re bad editorial judgment are not quite accurate; the novel has no "saucers" in it—but it is a terrific story. (Kris has sent us the first half already, and we think it's one of his best jobs.) Kris has one of the best styles—and talented imaginations of any writer in the field. His stories appear in all the leading stf magazines and nobody could call him a "typed" writer. (No pun intended!) A Neville story is something to watch for—so keep your eye on coming issues. . . *wlh**

NOTHING BUT THE BEST!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Thought I would drop a line or two to a swell science fiction magazine—Madge!

I have followed stf since the days of Hugo Gernsback—1926; also, your career too, which to say the least has been quite phenomenal. Madge is a bit of all right.

For some reason or other I've never bothered to drop a line to

any editor of science fiction in more than 25 years; but IMAGINATION has been so consistently good I had to break a long silence.

The May issue being at hand, I'll give you my comments.

COVER: Good eye-appeal—I know I'd hate to meet that face on a dark night!

STORIES: A short, EARTH CAN BE FUN by John W. Jakes takes first place with me. This was so refreshingly down-to-earth and simple; I never get tired of boy-and-girl themes with a good stf setting. THE FIST OF SHIVA was not a bad yarn at all. I purchase each and every stf magazine every month, and Madge is the only publication I read from cover to cover. The rest of them I'm lucky to get one or two good stories out of each issue.

CARTOONS: The best I've seen in any stf magazine in a long time.

Yes, Madge is my favorite because it's the best, and all I have to add is—keep it that way!

Al Comfort
2264 Chestnut Ave.
Long Beach, Cal.

A pleasure hearing from you, Al—but for goodness sake don't let another 25 years go by before you write another letter! The best? We'll certainly try and keep it that way wkh

OUTSTANDING NOVEL

Dear Bill:

I've started to write you after every issue since ARMAGEDDON, 1970 in the October 1952 issue, but somehow I just never got around to it.

In the May issue of Madge THE

FIST OF SHIVA far surpasses any lead novel in the last year. Its closest rival being EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville, February issue. As to shorts, keep Locke, Knight, Dick, and Nydahl. From the example he gave (Nydahl) in the May issue, LESSON FOR TODAY, I believe he can become a writer of Dan Galouye's stature.

Glad to know that Madge is now a monthly magazine. For one thing that means more fanzine reviews in FANDORA'S BOX. The fanzine angle is something new to me. I received my first one in the mail the other day, and since then have been shouting my praise for the whole movement.

Now for a few requests. Put a little more life in the reader column.—I don't care what this guy Carey likes or doesn't like — because he seems to be one of those people nothing will please. You should not waste space on adverse letters like his. What I meant by "life in the reader column" was that you have no drawing card. Someone, that is, who'll put a little fun or brain food in the letters.

I'd like a personal department and a better coming attraction set-up. You can ditch those science briefs, but not FANTASY FILM FLASHES. Easy on the cartoons. Madge is a science fiction magazine not an abbreviated version of 1000 Jokes!—But don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to complain—just feel that a few changes are in order.

I'd like to compliment one of your artists, Bill Terry. His work is some of the best I've seen. And, your May editorial was quite the thing. That Russian should try

writing stf for a living!

Burton K. Beerman
Grove School
Madison, Conn.

We don't plan the reader section, Burt; we feel that every letter is a "draw card" in itself. No single reader gets preference in having his letter published, and as to adverse comments, past experience shows you we're not using many such letters—there just aren't many to use! Hold down on the number of cartoons per issue? How about that, gang? So far they've been a big hit. And while we're on the subject of new features, do you like our new book review column?
... wkh

SUBSCRIBER FOR LIFE . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The May issue of Madge received, but I've only had time to read two stories thus far. All that can be said is that what *has* entered this thick skull of mine has met only approving brain cells.

LESSON FOR TODAY, the first story I read, was a complete and delightful surprise. EARTH CAN BE FUN, the other story I had time for, was easily the better of the two, because it is such a fresh idea. If the author's name had been omitted I'd have asked if Robert A. Heinlein had written it!

What really made me want to write before finishing the issue was your editorial. All I can say about that is if you continue to be so outspoken (and in the right at the same time) you have a subscriber for life.

A/1C James White
AF 19247861

2275th Base Serv. Sqdrn.
Beale AFB, Cal.

Glad you liked the editorial, Jim. No doubt Madge is in the process of being blacklisted by the Kremlin right now—which to our way of thinking is something to cheer about . . . Robert A. Heinlein story?—Would you like to have us get a new Heinlein story for Madge? . . . Come on, coax us!
... wkh

A TOP ISSUE

Dear Bill Hamling:

I just got the May issue of IMAGINATION today. I sat right down and started reading it—and didn't stop until I finished the entire issue.

THE FIST OF SHIVA was excellent. Dan Galouye has such a good record it's a wonder that he hasn't seen hard covers yet.

MILK RUN, very good—darned good! But not quite up to the standard set by DEEPFREEZE in the January issue.

EARTH CAN BE FUN, fair. I guess I wasn't very interested in it.

DOOM SATELLITE, very good. A real hair-raiser!

LESSON FOR TODAY, excellent! This is the kind of story that makes you think . . .

The letter section was very interesting this issue. I'm glad that Madge is going monthly—for the second time!

When are you going to publish the new Dwight V. Swain story you've talked about? And when is Geoff St. Reynard going to write a sequel to TOMORROW THE WORLD! . . . ?

All in all, the May issue is one of the best Madge has ever published.

John Walston
Vashon, Wash.

The "going monthly twice" business is due to a postal regulation. Madge started off as a bi-monthly and was so listed; then we went six-weekly, but were listed as monthly except for March, July and November; now Madge is published every four weeks so the monthly listing is finally accurate. . . . Dwight V. Swain will appear shortly, and Geoff St. Reynard has a great new novel coming up next month, THE BUTTONED SKY. Don't miss it! with

those cartoons are new, different, and nifty. Keep them by all means. In closing, I'd like to correspond with other stf fans.

Virginia Poore
6519 S. Emerald Ave.
Chicago 21, Ill.

As we've gone on record saying many times in the past, age is no barrier to enjoying and understanding science fiction. In our opinion the mere fact that a person reads science fiction puts him in a higher intelligence bracket! TOFFEE? You'll be seeing the impish lass again soon, we'll bet. . . . with

McCAULEY'S NIGHTMARE . . .

AGE IS NO BARRIER . . .

Dear Bill:

In the letter section for the May issue of Madge you show that you are one of those kind editors who realize teen-agers have intelligence! Hope you can convince some of the stodgy Victorians who call themselves critics! *Intelligent* critics—as insult to injury.

I've been reading science fiction for four years—since I was ten, and I not only enjoy what I read, but I thoroughly understand it. I wonder if some of the "adult" critics can say the same?

I'm glad Madge doesn't run serials. I always get mad when I see up to a hundred pages wasted when they could have been filled with a complete story!

In the May issue, Dan Galouye's THE FIST OF SHIVA was good. It also made sense—which makes the yarn nearly perfect.

How about more TOFFEE? And

Dear Bill:

Please send me right away one member of the SPITUF (Society for the Prevention of Inhuman Treatment to Unsuspecting Fen) so someone can read to me the May issue of Madge. I understand that THE FIST OF SHIVA is great, wonderful, superlative, and so forth—but I wouldn't know for sure. I've been blinded by that GHASTLY cover, which my unsuspecting eyes automatically riveted upon first thing. It's a sad world.

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What a fate for such a loyal reader of Madge who has read (and carefully saved) every issue to date, that her eyes should behold that nemesis of sanity, McCauley's Nightmare . . .

Ah, yes! I hear that all the stories in the May issue (except for MILK RUN) were way up there in readable enjoyment. That Madge is galloping to the top of the popularity list is a well known fact.

But honestly, did anyone actually write in this time and say they liked the grimacing ghoul plastered all over the cover? Well?

Aside from the above gripe, Madge is doing fine . . .

Quite a thought-provoking editorial this time, although by now Stalin is beyond hating anyone . . .

Now for a favor: I know there must be many femme fen in this state, so will they please come out of hiding and make themselves known? Come on, you gals—write to me!

Carol McKinney
385 N. 8th East St.
Provo, Utah

Sure we got a letter liking the May cover—artist McCauley writes us every issue! So it really blinded you, huh? Guess it was a striking cover after all! . . . with

IT STARED BACK AT HIM!

Dear Bill:

As I write this letter I am staring intently at the cover of the May issue. Impassively, the face of that—that thing—stares back at me!

The truth is, after your buildup about this particular cover I re-

ceived quite a let-down when I first saw it. And to think you described it as the "most striking" cover Madge has ever had! Doubtless there are many readers who will agree with you, but my opinion is that it looks like a splash of bright colors against a background of blue paper . . .

However, I was not disappointed by Daniel F. Galouye's cover novel, THE FIST OF SHIVA. It certainly lived up to expectations. Maybe because I like all stories about telepaths. Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed it. No doubt you will be presenting more of Galouye's splendid work in the future.

The rest of the stories were also very readable. The only one that made a negative impression on me was THE BIG CHEESE.

All in all, Bill, at the risk of sounding like Madge's average contented reader, the magazine is holding its own in the race for supremacy in the science fiction world.

I wonder if members of the Canadian Science Fiction Association would contact me . . .

Say, about that cover again. Maybe it grows on you. I'll have to wet it and see . . .

Daryl Sharp
RCAF
Greenwood, N. S.,
Canada

Lots more of Dan Galouye coming up, Daryl. The cover? The guy depicted there should be a baseball pitcher. He's sure thrown a lot of strikes! . . . with

GOOD MAILING SERVICE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The May issue of Madge is the best yet with a 100% score.

All the stories were good, especially the novel, THE FIST OF SHIVA. It is Dan Galouye's best story so far—and quite a record.

In THE BIG CHEESE the popular "rat" idea was handled very well indeed.

I'd like to compliment your subscription service; those heavy

envelopes you send Madge in get my copies to me in perfect shape.

Keep up the cartoons!

Harry Cannon
South Kent School
South Kent, Conn.

Subscribers always get preferred service, Harry . . . You non-subscribers, turn the page — quick! . . . wll

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